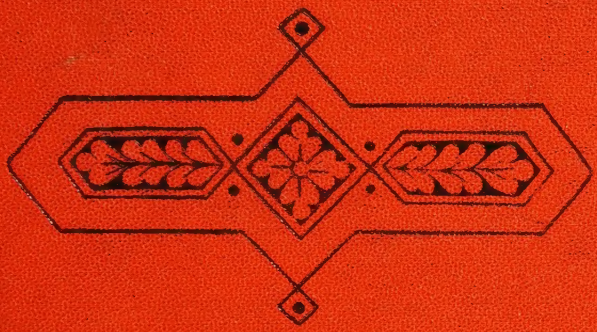

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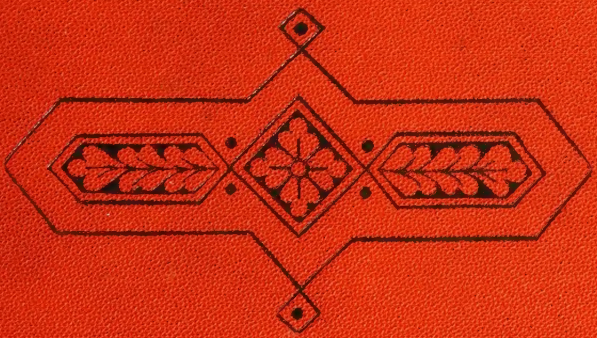

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THE EARLY MARRIAGE.

Rosa Jane Cotton.
From her affte Aunt C. M. B.
28 Jul: 1898

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OR,

THE EARLY MARRIAGE.

A Domestic Tale.

BY

HARRIETTE BOWRA,

AUTHORESS OF "REDLANDS."

London:

HODDER AND STOUGHTON,

27, PATERNOSTER ROW.

1872.

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UNA;

OR,

THE EARLY MARRIAGE.

CHAPTER I.

SUNSHINE.

WE do not usually boast of our London sun—we do not think much of it even in the brilliant month of May; more especially for those who have travelled has it a moderate value. The fleecy texture of our atmosphere tones down its brightness, and preserves our eyes from its overpowering splendour; nevertheless, the sun *does* shine in London, let our neighbours say what they may. That the sun does not shine in England was once a popular error, as much believed on the other side of the Channel as that Frenchmen lived on frogs was believed on this; nor have our many International Exhibitions enabled us as yet to say, "Nous avons changé tout cela," for popular errors are often fixed ideas, unsettled only in the course of generations. Not long ago a Parisian shop-keeper lamented to me that we had no sunshine and no fruit in England—a calumny I repudiated with warmth, yet left firmly fixed in the mind of the Parisian, to be repeated, I fear, a hundred times. To this very day many in sunny France believe that our island has no sunshine, and thus explain the national love for travelling.

It was a brilliant morning when I opened my eyes on the 4th of May. The sunshine poured into my room the moment West opened the shutters, not a cold, wavering

light, but a glorious flood. I have seen the sunshine of other lands—the deep blue sky of which Italy is so justly proud, beneath which nature basks in its gorgeous colouring—but no sunshine was ever to me like that 4th of May. There was sunshine in my heart, quickening the current of the warm blood, and stimulating the pulses into a faster beat. Like the waters of a fountain illumined by the sun, my thoughts were coruscations of light, sparkling with their own brightness, reflecting nothing but happiness.

As soon as I arose—which was later than usual, having only fallen asleep towards morning—I passed into the dressing-room adjoining my bed-room, where was still hanging up the dress I had worn the previous evening at Lady Winter's crush—white silk, whose rich sheen was softened by Honiton lace, caught up here and there with the red blossoms of the pomegranate. On the table lay the bright scarlet spray, considered so becoming in my dark hair, also a narrow band of diamonds, plainly set, which I had worn to please my father, though assured by many of the unsuitability of such an ornament for a young unmarried girl like myself. In my hurry to be alone with my own thoughts, I had dismissed my maid as soon as this part of my attire was removed, leaving her no opportunity to put it away. Well was it, perhaps, for my good name, that none saw the triumphant smile and complete satisfaction with which I now regarded the paraphernalia that had brought me both admiration and compliments. Had it been seen, and imputed, as it naturally would have been, to gratified vanity, I ought to have felt no surprise, false as the inference would have been. I was the rich Miss Randolph, accustomed to be courted by many, and, if language had its apparent signification, admired by some; to all I was equally impassive.

Two seasons and a half had rendered me unimpressionable. What, then, if not pride in myself, was the reason of this complacent contemplation of the articles which consti-

tuted my adornment of the evening before? Something far deeper than the pleasure I had once derived from these adventitious advantages;—it was because I had achieved a great success, and my foolish fancy found in them the explanation of my triumph. The only eye I cared to please had rested on me with gratification; the only voice which then could have spoken the admiration for which I longed, had expressed it last evening. Herbert Elmore, after playing fast and loose for nearly the whole season, had at Lady Winter's declared himself my captive, and sued for my hand.

Descriptions rarely convey a correct idea of the person described, and any attempt of mine would totally fail to produce a portrait satisfactory to myself. To say that the Honourable Herbert Elmore was tall, with blue eyes, and intermediate coloured hair, is indefinite indeed. With some he had the reputation of being one of the fastest men about town;—to me he was the most aristocratic and the most fascinating. Words could not describe the nameless charm I found in his society, whether it sprang from the sweetness of his voice or the refinement of his address.

By a variableness of conduct, keeping me ever uncertain as to the character of the feelings entertained towards me, he had stimulated the regard, which the previous season was only a passing interest, into a deep and real attachment. Yet, after all, this affection was based on nothing solid—a girlish fancy, one of those that spring up so often in the heart's history, not the less strong because unable to give an account of itself. I was nearly twenty, but older than my years—an earnest, passionate woman, whom fortune had loaded with gifts, and nature with advantages.

Before my toilet was completed, a message came from my father that he wished to see me downstairs in his own room, if I could come at once; if I could not, that he would come to me.

"Tell Mr. Randolph that I will be with him in less than ten minutes," was the answer, and forthwith I brought my dressing to a speedy conclusion.

My father's study, or room, as it was more appropriately designated—for little study, except that of legal documents when visited by his lawyer, went on there—was the only plainly-furnished one in the house. Plain it was by comparison, though handsome in itself; everything was good and simple, but heavy, partaking more of his commercial habits than his realised fortune. Our residence was one of the handsomest in Upper Grosvenor Street, furnished throughout, with this exception, in a style of great splendour.

Though young, I was ambitious, not alas! in its noble sense, seeking to shine by superior merit, or caring to rise by any careful mental cultivation above the ordinary level. A less elevating pre-eminence was enough for me. I was my father's darling, the stay of his widowed life, indulged in all wishes, reasonable and unreasonable, and with this I was satisfied. I liked to be told that we were rich, that we could spend like princes and live like nobles. Certainly I did my best to dissipate freely the wealth we were reputed to possess, unchecked, except now and then by my sister, when she occasionally paid us a visit with her husband. Though fifteen years my senior, her observations and well-meant suggestions met with little attention from me, being fully conscious that I, not she, was mistress at home. While I was a mere girl, she had married a staid, quiet man, who, having realised a comfortable fortune, had withdrawn from his mercantile house in Liverpool, and bought himself a property in Lancashire.

Soon after leaving school, I paid them a visit with my father, but had no wish to repeat it. Their quiet humdrum life, as I then impertinently called it, had no attraction for me, fresh as I was from a fashionable Brighton establishment.

It is not my intention to be more prosy than I can help;

therefore, without attempting a wearying description either of my tastes or character, which are in fact better revealed by the narrative itself than by any preliminary introduction, I return at once to the interview requested by my father.

He was sitting before a large business-like writing table, strewed with books, ledgers, and papers, more in character with the wealthy merchant than the retired gentleman. Looking up on my entrance with the smile which usually greeted my approach, he tapped the easy-chair beside him, and I sat down, first fondly laying my hand on his grey hair, and imprinting a kiss on his broad, smooth forehead. In doing this, my eye fell on a letter lying before him. Though in reality unacquainted with the handwriting, some magnetic influence from the unknown characters called a warm glow to my cheek.

"You know already the contents of this letter?" was my father's remark.

"Not exactly, but if it comes from Herbert Elmore, I can guess."

Without speaking, he placed the letter before me. I was not mistaken. Herbert had written to my father to sanction our engagement.

Shading my face from the watchful gaze so earnestly fixed upon me, I read the short page again and again, at first with a beating heart, then in a calmer mood, and finally laid it down with an ill-repressed sigh.

"Well, Una, what answer am I return?" asked my father; "his messenger waits."

There was no room for doubt or hesitation; the previous evening I had accepted him, and something of the joy of that moment still lingered about me.

"Before your promise is confirmed by my sanction, I would have you seriously consider what you are about to do," said my father, gravely. "It is an unequal match. You are young, handsome, and rich—but, remember, ours, though a respectable, is a self-made family—esteemed enough

by our own class, but only tolerated among those to whom the Honourable Herbert Elmore belongs. How will my beloved Una bear a position like that? Proud as she is, how will she like being the lowliest in the family circle?"

Meekness and patience were the last virtues to which I could lay claim; they were neither bestowed on me by nature nor acquired by education; yet I was not afraid. My father had described a position I was not able to realise. Flattered and followed for more than two seasons, the question just proposed by my father for consideration seemed too preposterous to be for a moment entertained. Too low an appreciation of myself was not my present foible. Vexed that even my father should make such a suggestion, my proud spirit took fire, and vented itself in the remark, "I will take care that no one shall look down on me!"

A smile and a caress were the immediate response, but after a few moments he added, thoughtfully, "I would far rather give you to a man like Pinnoch."

"Pinnoch!" I exclaimed, with unmeasured disdain, "who can compare Joshua Pinnoch with the handsome and refined Herbert Elmore? As well prefer glass to crystal, earthenware to china." I would have said gold to counterfeit, but I knew that I could only touch my brother-in-law externally with my sarcasm—his solid value being fully appreciated by my father. "Say nothing of the difference of name," I continued. "Pinnoch! why I should never be able to throw off the idea of lessons and catechisms. My life would be a perpetual asking and answering of questions. He does very well for Ellen, with her sober tastes and rural simplicity, but such an one would never do for me." Then, perceiving a pained expression on his face, I added, in a serious tone, which at once convinced him of my earnestness, "Besides, dear papa, I love Herbert Elmore—I love him passionately, and have long done so in my secret heart, though I never acknowledged it till last night. I have

given my promise, believing you would approve of it, for I can be happy with no other ;" and by way of seconding the appeal, I laid my glowing cheek upon his hand. Kissing my face, he again took up the letter. Why did I feel uneasy while he read it over so closely, as if sounding the value of the words? Why did my own heart find disappointment in its brevity? Some affections are *exigeante* and unreasonable, ever craving for more than they possess, ever forging fetters to gall themselves. I much fear that mine were of the number.

In a few minutes an answer was written, and the messenger was on his way to Mr. Elmore's rooms, bearing my father's consent and an invitation to join the family dinner. In little more than an hour I was again summoned from my room by the announcement—"Mr. Elmore is in the drawing-room."

The interview differed little, I suppose, from what is usual under such circumstances. Herbert talked and I listened, feeling conscious of a greater charm in the few soft sentences which came from his lips, than in all the numerous and varied flatteries to which I had so often been a constrained, if not an unwilling, listener. When he left me, which was not till long after luncheon, I ordered the carriage and drove to Hertford Street, Mayfair.

"Is Lady Mayfort there?" I asked, as the servant was about to throw open the drawing-room door. "She is in the boudoir upstairs," was the answer I anticipated. Dismissing him with an intimation that I would announce myself, I proceeded to the door always open to me, and, after a gentle knock, entered.

Lady Mayfort was my friend, as much so as could be expected from a woman of eight-and-thirty towards a girl of twenty. Some few years ago my father had rescued her from pecuniary difficulties, in which she had become involved through no fault of her own, and, in return, she bestowed all the kindness in her power upon his motherless child. By

her I was presented at Court, and generally chaperoned into society. Occasionally my father would accompany me, but not often. For the most part I was indebted to the kind offices of Lady Mayfort and her immediate friends for my good introductions and fashionable escort. At my first coming out she chose my society and instructed me in many of the finer shades of etiquette, endeavouring to teach, by her own example, those nameless womanly graces which a motherless girl so often loses.

By this time I had many acquaintances in the circle to which I belonged, but no friend so dear as Lady Mayfort. My acquaintances were but as flowers floating on the surface, carried whithersoever the current of prosperity might bear them. Lady Mayfort was to me the fairest amongst them all, and had attracted my sincere regard, more beautiful even in her maturity than the lovely blossoms of the present hour. I have often asked myself where lay the charm to which I yielded so completely, but I have never found a satisfactory answer. Yet it was, I have sometimes thought, to the exquisitely modulated tones of her voice, even more than to the softness of her manner, that Lady Mayfort was indebted for her power of fascination. There was no originality in what she said, no word of strength or wisdom to encourage or instruct, nothing when uttered to leave its trace on mind or heart, yet I never wearied of her society. I always enjoyed a *tête-à-tête* with her, and still more those little dinners of four and six, which often preceded the evening entertainments to which she accompanied me. During our two years' intercourse, I had never seen her ruffled in look or manner, nor even heard a tone departing from its usual sweetness.

Looking back now from the border-land of matured life, I can read many a riddle which puzzled me in youth. Experience throws its light into many a dark corner, and sweeps away the gossamer fabrics of untutored fancy. Lady Mayfort had many attractions—many acquired gifts and

graces, but her character, like my own, was formed for the sunny side of the world. As light is necessary for the healthy development of plants, so our friendship required to be sustained by prosperity. Neither the one nor the other could flourish in a darkened atmosphere. It was said of me, when a child, that I was always amiable when not thwarted —small praise, it is true, or rather a reproach disguised. I had yet to learn, that in this respect, my model was no better than myself. With no other steerage than what habit and conventional regulations supplied, it was not surprising that we should sometimes drift into troubled waters. The rules of society, however delicately drawn, are unequal to all emergencies. For the smooth paths, they had hitherto been sufficient, and smooth paths were those we sought, without reflecting on the goal to which they led.

I was happy, supremely happy. Something unusually bright must have been in my face and manner, as I seated myself opposite Lady Mayfort, who was occupied with a pile of invitation cards on a table before her.

"Help me to find an evening disengaged for my entertainment. Here are my tablets—look over them, Una. There are apparently three days to choose from. Do you recollect any engagement likely to interfere with me?"

Taking the tablets as desired, and hastily looking over them, I presently laid them down, saying that I remembered nothing in prospect for the three evenings mentioned.

Lady Mayfort looked up. "Una, what is the matter? You look as if a sunbeam had fallen on you. Mrs. Olliver proved, I hope, a careful chaperon last evening; I was sorry not to be able to accompany you myself. You did not, I trust, amuse yourself too much. Without my warning eye, you are apt to be too—natural, I will say. We like soft-sounding words," added she, with a smile.

Too impulsive, she meant—too disposed to say what I thought, to laugh when pleased, and also to testify too unequivocally my contempt for some of the shallow-headed

coxcombs, who sought to please by drawling out a string of idle compliments.

"I consider my conduct to have been exemplary," was my reply to the inquiring eye of Lady Mayfort, as she concluded her remarks upon my appearance.

"Something has happened, what is it?" she continued.

There was no cause for hesitation. I came expressly to make my fortune known. It could not be many hours a secret, but I wished to tell my friend myself. So without circumlocution I quickly answered, "Last evening Herbert Elmore proposed, and I accepted him."

"You accepted Herbert Elmore!" she slowly repeated, while her eye dilated, and a deeper shade of colour mantled her cheek.

"I accepted him at Lady Winter's party, and this morning my father gave his consent. Herbert has just left me. I came straight to you, wishing my best friend to hear the news first from my own lips."

Instead of the genial response I expected, she continued to regard me with an expression I could not explain—it was so fixed, yet so dull, as if my words obtained no credit or conveyed no meaning. Not comprehending her silence, I endeavoured to break it by asking for her congratulations.

"I have none to give," was the answer.

"But, Lady Mayfort, what do you mean?" I said, impetuously. "You must congratulate me. I am going to marry the man I love—the only one who has ever stirred a real feeling in my bosom; the only one, also, out of those who have been pleased to seek my society, who has never flattered, or whose good opinion I ever cared to possess."

What more I might have said in my heroics I know not. She brought me down into common life by the cold remark, "Una, you have disappointed me."

These words, still more the icy tone in which they were uttered, startled me exceedingly. A galvanic-battery could not have sent a more unexpected shock through my system.

The blow had fallen on my pride. My first impulse was to demand a further explanation, the second was to yield to the instincts of affection. Drawing near to her, and placing my arm round her waist, I murmured, "I love you, Lady Mayfort, very dearly; have you no sympathy with my happiness?"

Accepting, without returning my caresses, she replied, in a dry voice, "You have deceived me."

"How can I have deceived you? Never have I spoken, to my knowledge, a word that was untrue."

"You never gave me an idea of what was going on."

"Nothing was going on, dear Lady Mayfort," I said, with energy, now hoping to win back her confidence. "I could not tell you of that which did not exist. As soon as there is an event in my life, I come and make you acquainted with it. What could I do more?"

"You never let me know that you were attached to Mr. Elmore." Her tone was almost that of a spoilt, petulant child.

"I could not tell you that which I carefully concealed even from myself. Now I can tell you all; but who would like to reveal the idle dreams in which the foolish brain will sometimes indulge?"

"What will Lionel say? He will be more disappointed than I am!" was her next observation.

The secret was out! Lionel Osborne, her nephew, my ever gay and willing companion, was not, then, as I had so simply imagined, a mere friend, ever ready to escort us hither and thither as a kind nephew dutifully attendant on his aunt; but a suitor in disguise, a fortune-seeker, one for whose benefit our little social meetings were organised, in which it always fell to him to have the special charge of me. First arose the suspicion, then came the persuasion, as she afterwards added, "You are very wealthy—how do you know that that circumstance is not the principal attraction to Mr. Elmore?"

I did not know, did not care to know, but put the thought from me, as I would a noxious draught too bitter for the lips to taste; yet a spasm of pain shot across my heart. The bare idea was gall and wormwood. To entertain it would have turned my sunshine into darkness. Of others I had easily believed it, and claimed some credit for my acuteness of observation. It amused oftener than it vexed me, for it touched no vital part. Here it was different —my whole soul rose up against a charge so destructive to its peace; resolutely I ignored the insinuation, and replied, "I thought Lady Mayfort and Lionel Osborne were my friends, able to rejoice in my happiness, as it is natural for friends to do, unless under circumstances which frustrate their own designs," I added in, I fear, a sarcastic tone. The imputation upon Herbert stung me to the quick, and brought to my lips the resentment kindled in my heart.

"I wish you happiness, Una," said Lady Mayfort, after another pause, holding out her hand coldly, and just touching mine with the tips of her fingers. "I believe I could have chosen better for you than you have done for yourself. Lionel is not perhaps so externally attractive as Mr. Elmore, but my belief is that he is a better man."

Notwithstanding the smile with which she accompanied her words, the icy coldness of her manner brought me the full conviction that I had lost my friend. My heart-treasures were very few. The ties of kindred, those blossoms that with some shed such sweet fragrance along the path of life, had added little to mine. For enjoyment there must be congeniality as well as natural relationship, and this had not fallen to my lot. The fault was mine. Friendship, rather than relationship, had been the bond most cultivated, and now I was to lose it. The brightest gem I had till now possessed had fallen from its setting. Would the new affection—the strongest, yet the tenderest and the most precious of all human affections—compensate me for my loss? I thought so. I was young, and the sun-

shine fell upon my path. When we are carried by the imagination into the future, who does not overleap the crosses that lie in the way? Could we gather up the unfulfilled expectations of even one lifetime, it would be a sad and dreary record, an eloquent testimony to the truth of the Preacher's moralising, "All is vanity." Like rootless plants, whose leaves and blossoms early fall and wither on the soil they might have adorned, our joyous expectations, having no root in the rich soil of divine promise and of truth, pass away, one by one, unrealised. The blossoms which adorn the distant pathway of life are not gathered as refreshing fruit, but wither at our approach. The harvest of our hopes is ever yet to come.

Not liking to ask Lady Mayfort, after what had passed, to accompany me in my drive in the Park, I stayed long enough to turn the conversation upon other subjects, and then went away, knowing too well that the happy intercourse of more than two years' duration was over—at least, in its intimacy—and about to be merged into that of a common-place acquaintance. Heaviness lay at my heart as I descended that staircase, so often trodden in my gleesome moods. For the moment, my regret was really bitter. Shall I be thought volatile when I say how soon the transient emotion passed away? Shall I not rather add—Happy youth! when the mind is elastic enough to rebound, almost at will, from the early blows of disappointment; when every blossom promises to ripen into fruit, and yield a golden harvest?

No sooner was I seated in the carriage, and the balmy air again fanning my cheeks, than my buoyant spirits rose high as before. The transient cloud had but dimmed the sun's brightness for a little moment, permitting it to shine anew with the same splendour as before.

CHAPTER II.

CLOUD.

FROM Lady Mayfort's I proceeded direct to pay another visit—this time in no fashionable quarter, but to a neat and modest lodging in Conduit Street. As I reached the top of the stairs, my father was coming out at the door of the apartment I was about to enter. Laying his hand on my shoulder with a smile, he uttered some word of fondness and passed on. Taking the unclosed door from his hand, I entered the room without its occupant being aware of the presence of a visitor.

How can I describe or find language adequate to convey the impression made on me by the singular—I would say, mysterious—character I was now visiting.

Julie Kenyon was not young—I could not tell her age—but something almost youthful, owing perhaps to her brilliant complexion, lingered at times about her, though to me, having been the friend of my mother, she appeared of a bygone generation. One dared not say, "grey-haired with anguish," yet I often thought of Byron's "Manfred" as I looked upon her now quiet and always remarkable countenance, and found my thoughts repeating—

> "Grey-haired with anguish—like the blasted pines,
> Wrecks of a single winter."

Every feature was handsome, but of marble stillness; the dark eye, always bright by contrast with the silver hair, never flashed, and the mouth rarely smiled, but when it did, there was no hilarity in the smile, it remained fixed, frozen on the lips as if it had not life enough to fade away.

As I saw her now, a change had indeed passed over her, converting the Julie Kenyon of my acquaintance into an ordinary woman—that is, one whose soul could bow to sorrow, and vent its feelings after the manner of nature. Her head was buried in the cushions of the sofa on which she sat, and sobs, loud and deep, shook her frame. Tears from the weeping Madonna, so easily credited by the benighted ignorance of the Italian peasantry, are not more difficult of belief to the Protestant mind than the scene before my eyes was to me. With simple wonder I stood and gazed, unable to speak, rejecting the very evidence of my senses. Almost as soon should I have looked for real tears on the marble cheeks of a Hebe or a Ganymede; yet I doubt whether those I saw were of the kind to give relief, the soft healing which assuage a sorrow they cannot remove, but rather convulsive throbs—a battling against natural feeling, which only tends to harden the character into repulsive rigidity.

The rustle of my dress, as I advanced further into the room, caught her ear, and she started up, saying, "Una, how came you here, a spy upon my privacy?—henceforth I shall hate you!"

"Julie! Julie! I am no spy," I uttered meekly, surprised into defending myself. "I entered the room as I usually do. My father was closing the door when I took the handle from him, indeed, I believe he actually shut it on me." I did not tell her that the scene within had so transfixed me, that I remembered nothing exactly.

By the time these words were spoken, she had resumed an upright posture, and sat calm and quiet, the only trace of agitation now visible was the pallor which had replaced the beautiful crimson colour of her cheeks.

It was a strange fact in our family, though no one asked the reason, that Julie Kenyon was the friend in need, that is, the person sought when no better, kinder, or more congenial was at hand. She was not one to have near you in

a moment of doubt, difficulty, or sorrow—never when the mind or heart seeks a healing sympathy, or would unburden its grief. She was, however, a serviceable friend—prompt and sensible, ready to do that which others would not; paradoxically speaking, the more willingly when most distasteful to herself. Her conversation never pleased me; like the snail on the wall, it left an unpleasing trace behind it. Her sentiments chilled, and her religion repelled me. To my father she was a friend—his only confidante—though how he found courage to confide his anxieties or cares to that unimpressionable heart, I never could imagine.

On the present occasion, wishing to drive in the Park, I had come to claim her as a chaperon, the more agreeable society of Lady Mayfort being no longer at my command.

"You have heard the news?" I said, supposing the intelligence to which I referred to have been already conveyed by my father.

A bend of the head was the only answer; perhaps the disturbed state of her feelings made her suspect the steadiness of her voice.

"And you congratulate me?" I added.

Why must I put that question? Why did not my foolish heart content itself with its own happiness? Why must I seek its radiation in every one around me? Perhaps my face expressed too much of this earth's joy for one who had known so little of it, who thought it right to teach that the world was a snare and pleasure a delusion, and by a contradiction I could not understand, urged the voluntary resignation of all we valued, as the surest principle of happiness.

To my extreme astonishment, but without moving a muscle, she answered in a tone so deep, it appeared to proceed from a distance, "You remind me of your mother: when the crisis of her life arrived, she sought my congratu-

lations. Were it not a sin for which I must pay the bitter penalty, I should hate you as long as I lived."

"Is it my mother or my happiness which moves you to hatred?" I asked, scarcely knowing what I said.

Without answering my question, she raised her eyes, not stony as heretofore, but kindling with the unwonted fire of energy. "Una, Una," she said, laying a heavy hand upon my wrist, and tightening her clasp as sentence succeeded sentence; "beware of the beginning of evil—beware how you admit the first thought of anger, passion, pride, or jealousy to your bosom. If you suspect its existence, search for it—pluck it out, cast it down, tread upon it; were it small as the mote that dances in the sunbeam, insignificant as the tiniest grain of sand—crush it at once and for ever, lest it grow beyond your control. If voluntarily indulged, you will be left to yourself, and the fatal evil will wither your life with its deadly upas blast!"

Was this the quiet Julie, impassive even in her sternness? What had stirred that rigid being into such a state of excitement?—what event had lashed the usually still waters into such convulsive agitation?

Not knowing what else to say, and perceiving that she expected to be answered, I merely expressed a hope that I was not worse than others.

"Am I worse than others?" she asked with vehemence. "Look at my life. Do I fail in my duties, religious, moral, or social? Do I seek amusement and enjoyment?—do I not rather desire to give up myself to others? Yet this day have I not refused what I most value, because unworthy to possess it? I told you to beware of sin," she continued, in a harsh, grating voice, "sin within—do you hear me? I do not mean the open act which any one can condemn, nor the hasty word, but the dark thought which precedes it, which is not written on the brow, nor seen in the clear light of the eye;—I mean the inner secret breath, scarce wakened into life—the inner movement we would veil

from sight, rendering thanks that none can see us as we really are. Did I say *none?* Yes, there is One, and 'He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness.' There may be pardon above, when the weary burden has been faithfully carried to the end; but none here, only sure and certain retribution. The cup is given you pure, even if bitter; once drop into it the poison of your own unholy will, and you must drink it to the dregs. Therefore I say, Una, beware of the first wrong thought—stamp it out, or it will cause you a life-time expiation."

Never before had Julie expressed her sentiments so clearly, though they had often been dimly shadowed forth in her conversation. One felt she had a history, unapproachable as it had always been. As she was the only person who talked to me about religion, it was no marvel that I cared little for the subject, her views also being far too gloomy to be acceptable. Voluntary expiation, or sure punishment for every offence, was not a doctrine likely to find favour with a young and thoughtless girl, whose sole object in life was enjoyment. Julie knew nothing, nor at that time did I, of the deep, satisfying joys which flow from a knowledge of the heart and character of God as revealed in the Cross of Christ. I did not know that the expiation of sin was the work of Christ, and that "His blood cleanses from *all* sin." These words, so often heard, had as yet no practical power—"God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Poor Julie! with all her good intentions, it was not in her character to attract to the love and culture of piety those who were strangers to its influence, nor to encourage the weak, or cheer the desponding. Yet to have ministered to the comfort of others would have brought her the purest satisfaction, the only pleasure she could have permitted herself to enjoy. Had she known that she disobeyed the injunction, "Let not your good be evil spoken of," and

dishonoured her profession by repelling the young and ignorant, she would have become even more unhappy under the weight of such a responsibility. In general I mocked at her opinions, calling them ascetical and foolish, but always avoided such conversations, and very seldom visited her, except when, as now, I required her services. In spite of myself, her solemn words and unusual manner made an impression, and the pleasant thoughts which I had brought with me began to vanish. My happiness had received an unexpected blow, and I could not tell from whence it came. Certainly I had no sympathy with Julie's ideas; if she was religious, I had no wish, no need to become so. In my own estimation I had no sin to expiate, no deserved punishment to anticipate. Kind and good-natured to others, I was a general favourite, and hitherto no trouble of any moment had oppressed me. In the retrospect I hastily made, there was no fault to discover, except—yes, I was conscious of disliking Miss Rogers last year, because Herbert Elmore seemed to be paying court to her. Was it from such a feeling as that, so common, so insignificant in itself, that she was warning me?—for such a trifle was so magniloquent a vocabulary of sentences to be arrayed against me? The idea made me laugh—it was indeed bringing out a steam-engine to crush a fly.

"What are you laughing at, Una?" she presently asked, in her natural voice.

"I was jealous of Miss Rogers last season, but I am not now. According to you, I did no wrong, for you see I have not been punished—I have won the day."

"If you were really jealous, you sinned, and you will be punished. Time, if a slow, is a sure avenger. You are only on the threshold of life," she said, sternly.

"I did not sin, and I shall not be punished!" I answered, hastily. "You shall not infect me with your horrid notions. I will hear no more of them; I would rather be a

heathen than a Christian after your fashion." I think Julie thought me little better then, but she had this good quality —never to force her observations upon me, generally relapsing into silence when I refused to listen.

"Did you not tell me that Miss Rogers is an heiress?" she presently asked.

"Yes, but she is no beauty; I am not really jealous of her," I answered, and could not help casting a complacent glance at the mirror before me.

> "L'or donne aux plus laids, certains charmes pour plaire,
> Et sans lui, le reste est une triste affaire,"

she slowly repeated.

Julie had now returned into ordinary life, and I knew how to meet her there. So glad was I to get away from the topics she handled so disagreeably, that I paid no attention at the moment to the drift of the quotation. It was easy then to mention my request, which, as I expected, met with immediate compliance.

After a short time spent in making a few purchases, we entered the Park, and were driving among the fashionable throng. Although I found no real enjoyment in Julie's society, but a continual *malaise*—she being at the best of times a poor substitute for Lady Mayfort—still it was not unpleasant occasionally to drive with her. Her remarkable appearance always attracted attention, and it was an unfailing amusement to witness the curiosity she at first awakened. We had only made half a turn, when a gentleman rode up to the carriage, and I had the pleasure of trying my favourite experiment on Herbert, noting at the same time the look of surprise with which he acknowledged the presentation. After a few words, she leaned back and appeared occupied with the scene about her, taking no notice of us—a refined though unnecessary attention, for nothing was said which all the world might not have heard.

"What do you think of my Herbert?" I asked, when

the drive was over, the emphasis on the possessive pronoun betokening how proudly I appreciated my prize.

"He is like a hundred others," she replied, coldly.

"Far from it; he is handsomer, gentler, nobler; I never saw any one to be compared to him," answered I, enthusiastically, her measured words having irritated me into extravagant praise.

"He looks older than he is; your father told me he was only five-and-twenty, and he appears thirty. He has lived fast, most likely."

"Now, Julie, you shall not say that!" said I, angrily. "You know nothing about him; why will you surmise so uncharitably?"

"I know that if you would walk on roses you must scatter the leaves before your own feet. Do you recollect how you introduced him to me? and did you note at the same time the expression of his countenance?"

I had observed what I fancied was surprise at the sight of my companion, but that, being nothing unusual in those who saw her for the first time, had not arrested my attention. Puzzled by her question, I eagerly asked what I had said.

"I do not accuse you of being wholly taken up with the title in prospect, but you show yourself fully conscious of being about to marry the son of a Baron: you presented him to me as the Honourable Herbert Elmore. Without being schooled like you in fashionable life, I know enough of it to perceive that you committed a solecism in breeding, and laid yourself open to the appellation of parvenu."

"Is it true that I did so, Julie? What could have possessed me!" exclaimed I, now sorely distressed. Of all the mistakes that I could make, one of that kind was the most likely to offend the fastidious taste of Mr. Elmore. I have heard the proverb that a slip on the pavement is better than a slip of the tongue, and so it appeared to me now. What could have brought the unguarded language to my lips? Such was not my style of talking. I had been too long

accustomed to mix with titles, to be dazzled with one so simple. Higher than Herbert in the social scale had professed themselves my admirers, and I had turned coldly away. Why should I, at the beginning of our relationship, vex him, and lower myself, by such a foolish mistake?

After setting Julie down at her own door, I went home, and, with secret uneasiness and real dissatisfaction, repaired to my room, and bethought me of the toilet I had to make for the first family dinner with Herbert. Determined not to err by unnecessary display, to the disgust of my maid, I chose one of the simplest white dresses I possessed, rejecting all ornaments, and only permitting her to place in my hair one natural pink and white camellia, of the richest colouring I could find. I then fastened another in the centre of my band, and went downstairs a few minutes before dinner. Herbert had already arrived, and was standing before one of the windows talking to my father. The room was large and full of mirrors, and the distance from the door to the window long enough to bring me into full observation.

"You have not honoured us much by your toilet, you are simplicity itself," said my father, addressing me as I approached. It was his weakness to value what was costly, rather than what was pretty. I looked at Herbert; at this moment his opinion alone was of consequence to me. Holding out his hand for mine, he answered, with the smile which had always exercised an unaccountable fascination over me, "Perfect simplicity is perfect taste."

My uneasiness respecting the effect of the unnecessarily mentioned title with which I had introduced him to Julie being dispelled, I ventured to hope that she had been mistaken as to the impression produced, and became natural and unconstrained.

The following day dispelled the pleasant delusion. During Herbert's morning visit, the conversation turned upon the large party to be given that evening by Lady

B——, at which that indefinite "everybody," of whom one hears so much, was to be present.

"Your father, not Lady Mayfort, will accompany you to-night," said Herbert, trying, as I thought, to give the ordinary intonation to his voice, yet not succeeding in blinding me to the fact that he thought it necessary to give me some instruction in the observation of *les bienséances* of society, which, taken in conjunction with my slip, vexed me not a little.

"Of course he will," I replied, rather haughtily. I could not bear him to think me deficient in the knowledge to which he appeared to attach so much importance, though I had not as yet given the subject a thought. Lady Mayfort usually chaperoned me; she would, I knew, be there; but till this moment I had forgotten the result of her coolness towards me—her kind offices were over. At my hasty answer the question dropped, not, however, without my being conscious that the quickness, not to say sharpness, of my manner, occasioned him some little surprise.

The next thing was to secure my father, and for that purpose I repaired to his room as soon as Herbert left me.

"My dear Una, I have to attend a public dinner to-day. I told you so yesterday, and hoped that you would, as usual, dine with Lady Mayfort," said my father, with a little vexation in his tone.

"I can wait until you return home; I do not mind going late," I replied; then added, with some embarrassment, feeling that I was making use of the lesson just received myself, "Herbert thinks you should accompany me to-night; our engagement will be generally known. Of course on this occasion it is natural that he should expect me to appear in public supported by my father."

The dear old man disliked these long, late evenings and fashionable gatherings, but he disliked still more to disappoint me, so he promised to be home by ten o'clock, and permit himself to be victimised for this once. I had

not the courage to tell him of the estrangement of Lady Mayfort, and consequently of the existing necessity of looking to him chiefly for escort during the period intervening before my marriage.

It was considerably past ten when my father came home, and quite eleven o'clock before I entered Lady B——'s well-crowded rooms. One gratification arose out of the delay. Herbert was waiting near the door when I arrived, and expressed disappointment at my being so late. Towards the end of the entertainment I was consigned to Herbert's care, and, leaning on his arm, made a tour of the rooms. I had just given him an amused smile as some one whispered to her neighbour as we passed, but loud enough to be overheard, "They are a handsome couple," when Mr. Norris, a gentleman I had often met, addressed us, saying, as he looked from one to the other, "I would offer my congratulations, did I but know which of you to address."

"I should say that the rules of good taste would obviate the difficulty," replied Herbert.

"So should I, did you not look so intensely bored," said Mr. Norris.

"You are jealous," said Herbert, quickly passing on, while I remarked a flash of something which, had it not been so transient, I should have called displeasure, pass over the countenance of our cynical friend.

"He is one of our nearest neighbours at the Beeches, and a favourite with my mother," said Herbert, when we had moved away. "Unfortunately there is little sympathy between him and me."

Unfortunately, I could repeat, as I was inclined to like him rather more than the generality of those I met in society, though he had never testified any wish for an intimate acquaintance.

To my father's great satisfaction, the evening was over at last. With a sigh of relief he threw himself back in the carriage, and was actually asleep before we reached Upper

Grosvenor Street, while I was revelling in dreams of fortune and happiness, and dwelling upon the increasing charm which Herbert's silver voice and pleasing manner ever had for me.

The middle of June was fixed upon for the marriage, which, at Herbert's request, was to be as simple as possible. But for this, in honour of the family into which I was entering, my father would have spared neither expense nor display.

Disliking publicity at all times, Herbert appeared especially averse to it on this occasion. I also had my fancies, and would not allow my sister and her husband to be invited to the wedding. My sister might have passed, but Mr. Pinnoch, with his northern accent and homely manners, would have appeared altogether out of place among the aristocratic friends of Herbert Elmore. I was weak and foolish, and had not learnt the noble precept, "Fais ce que dois, advienne que pourra."

A few days before the wedding, going suddenly into my father's private room, I found him engaged with Mr. Slater, his man of business. A pile of papers lay before him, in the perusal of which he was so absorbed as not to perceive my approach.

"Literally crippled with debt, and so young!" Mr. Slater was saying.

Seeing me enter the room he stopped short, and commenced rapidly turning over the writings before him.

"He is at least honest, he has not deceived, but stated the truth very willingly," replied my father; then perceiving me at his side, he laid down his pen and asked what were my wishes.

"Money, dear papa," I replied, laconically, and laying an empty purse before him, added, "I want that filled."

"No, no, she is not extravagant, she rarely asks for money beyond her allowance," said my father, answering the look approaching to consternation which Mr. Slater's face expressed; "besides, these are exceptional times."

With this, he transferred the sovereigns he had in his pocket to my purse, and I went away, giving no heed to what I had heard or seen. So many persons were connected with my father in business transactions that I took no further notice of what had occurred.

"Do you really think that you can never feel for another the same amount of regard that you do for Mr. Elmore?" was my father's somewhat startling question that evening after dinner, when the servants had retired, leaving us to a pleasant *tête-à-tête.*

"I am quite sure," was the ready answer.

A foolish assertion; quite sure belongs only to the present, scarcely to that. Who shall dare, without reckless disregard of truth, to apply it to the future—that future veiled in darkness too profound for the keenest vision to penetrate?

My father was satisfied, and made no objection to the match. Like me, I believe he was captivated by the suavity and attractive manners of his destined son-in-law.

Julie Kenyon was invited to the wedding, and came, looking sternly handsome—by way of penance, one might almost say, for not the semblance of gratification could be traced on her marble countenance.

After the ceremony we went to Ryde, where my father had a house which we generally occupied in the autumn. Herbert liked the sea, and was especially fond of yachting. To me all places were alike just then, all were enveloped in the dazzling haze which a sanguine temperament and lively imagination know so well how to create. The only dark shade in the *couleur de rose* pervading my life was the visit in prospect which we had to pay at the Beeches, the residence of Lord and Lady Elmore, in the middle of July. With the pecuniary arrangements made by my father, I was then unacquainted. Herbert was in the main satisfied, and so was I. One thing surprised me. All at once, my father settled that we might go where we liked in the

summer, but that the winter months should be spent with him, alleging as a reason that we were both young and rather too expensive in our tastes to have a separate establishment. The house in Upper Grosvenor Street being large, there was room enough, he thought, for two families, and proposed our installing ourselves and making our arrangements irrespective of him.

Fond as I was of Herbert, I conceived no corresponding affection for his family, and notwithstanding that I knew the visit to the Beeches to be inevitable, I regarded it with unmitigated dissatisfaction. The few stiff lines of welcome as a daughter received from Lady Elmore had not prepossessed me in her favour, nor anything I had casually picked up from fashionable gossip. Nor was my good-will increased by the word of warning given me by Herbert on two occasions, when he checked an exuberant display of affection on my part, by the caution not to indulge in such demonstrations in the presence of his mother. Although the caress was in a measure returned, and the words were half-playfully spoken, they grated strangely. My fervent love and excitable nature could ill brook that considerations for another should come between him and me, or that the regulation of my feelings should be in any way dependent on the taste of Lady Elmore. Already one of those little seeds of evil, from the effects of which poor Julie so strenuously warned me, had dropped into my heart and found a too congenial soil. Alas! I had no sense of responsibility with regard to the cultivation of my own personal character, no determination to do my part in life. Instead of exercising forbearance and indulgence towards others, it was my fatality to convert what displeased me into "a pricking briar," ever at hand to wound and irritate me into resistance.

In my hour of prosperity, I could enjoy the full cup, but had no thought to thank the Giver from whom it came. Such sentiments, containing as they do the germ of the most

refined happiness of which the heart is capable, have no spontaneous growth, and as yet I had not learned them. For the best part of my life it might have been truly said to me, as to the heathen monarch—"The God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified."

Nor had I any self-discipline. I could not take things, friends, or relations, as I found them. I would not accept a great deficiency of character, and make the best of it. With the ignorance of youth, I admitted of no shades, and having really no better standard, measured everything by my own wishes and opinions—no very promising storehouse from which to draw lessons for the commencement of domestic life. I once read—"Before we grow old, we learn that the character of nineteen or twenty is not worth a thought." A great mistake; before that time the foundation of our moral life is generally laid, the issue of which is happiness or sorrow. The soil is prepared, and light or darkness is sown even for the fields of Time, to say nothing of that greater Harvest where the corn is gathered into garners, and the tares into bundles to burn. Far better is the early responsibility thus inculcated—"Even a child is known by his doings."

CHAPTER III.

THE VISIT.

THE visit to the Beeches being unavoidable, I was wise enough to make no opposition, but merely informed Herbert that I should look to him to make the time pass agreeably; an observation to which he responded by the assurance that there would be plenty of company.

Lord Elmore's carriage being in waiting at the station, we were soon on our way to the Beeches. A long avenue of trees led from the road to the park. They were of old and stately growth, and had probably given the name to the place. My husband was evidently very proud of them, judging from the manner in which he called my attention to their age and luxuriance. I ought certainly to have sympathised in his admiration, but passing suddenly from the bright sunshine into the overshadowing gloom, the dark masses, spreading their arms high overhead, awakened in me no consciousness of their beauty, only a dull, joyless sensation, a chilling effect upon my spirits, which was scarcely removed when, issuing from the avenue, we entered a handsome and cheerful-looking park. It did not seem very large, as I appeared to take in the whole at once, or at least to form an idea of its extent. A large, dull-looking house stood out in the distant view, and a fine piece of water, glittering in the sunshine, lay immediately before us. A thick plantation of trees hid the rest. The water so pleased me that, taking no note of anything besides, I broke forth into warm expressions of admiration, and had not exhausted my eloquence when the carriage drove up to the door. An old-

fashioned butler, stiff and starch as if he had never bent his body nor been ruffled in all his life, was in attendance, and as soon as I was fairly inside the hall, threw open a door on the right.

My ordeal had come! What should I think of Lady Elmore was uppermost in my mind. What she would think of me, troubled me very little. After waiting a few minutes for Herbert, I took his arm and found myself in the presence of my mother-in-law.

Lady Elmore was at the farther end of a long room, and as she slowly rose at my approach, I had a good opportunity of observing her. She was tall and slender, dignified rather than haughty, had once been handsome, and was even now, though past fifty, exceedingly good-looking—what our neighbours would call *bien conservée.* Her hair was still dark; her eye, of a cold, passionless grey, did not promise much sensibility of feeling. The nose was aquiline, and of that marked form generally indicating strength of character; but the principal feature which arrested my attention was the mouth. Strictly examined, it was well formed; but the first impression was not pleasing. The lips were thin and pale, tightly compressed, and almost stern in expression. The cold kiss she imprinted on my cheek as part of the maternal duty would have frozen all feeling within me, had any previously existed; her words, however, were more gracious than her manner. "I welcome you as a daughter," was kindly said, and the voice was sweet, like Herbert's. It was now his turn to receive his mother's salutation, and great was my surprise at perceiving how little warmth was exhibited on either side. Hitherto I had felt with secret disappointment that Herbert's calm temperament little corresponded to my ardent nature; for a moment the conviction was forced upon me, that if this meeting showed the measure of his affection for his mother, his wife had really no just cause for complaint. Yet the absence of all warmth in the atmosphere I now breathed, chilled and depressed me. My father was such a

loving parent, always ready and pleased both to give and receive those demonstrations of tenderness so natural and so dear to persons of my disposition. Their total absence here did not impress me favourably, or give me hope of finding sympathy in the family. I had not, however, seen Lord Elmore; perhaps he would better suit my taste than my cold and stately mother-in-law. He was an invalid, I knew, slightly paralysed, and went about in a chair. Already I had mentally placed myself at his side as a kind and attentive daughter. After a little formal conversation with Lady Elmore, I was glad to hear my husband propose taking me to his father, a satisfaction increased by finding that our visit was to be paid alone. After crossing a handsome hall, we entered a passage where were several doors. Herbert opened one, and I found myself inside a comfortable room, well stocked with books, the windows of which, more than half-way down to the ground, overlooked a retired part of the lawn. In an easy chair on wheels, so constructed that he could move about at will, sat Lord Elmore, reading the newspaper. Looking up with a smile as we approached, he held out his hand to his son.

"My wife has come to see you," said Herbert, addressing him; then turning to me, continued, "You must make the advances, Una, for my father cannot move as he wishes."

Immediately stooping down, I offered my cheek to the old man, understanding that to be the meaning of Herbert's remark. His salutation was very different from Lady Elmore's; he evidently regarded me with approbation.

"You will come and see me as often as you can," he said, slowly, which I readily promised, taking at the same time the chair Herbert placed for me close to his side.

At this moment Lady Elmore entered, and proposed showing me my room—an honour I was evidently expected to appreciate. Rising to accompany her, I kissed my father-in-law, remarking that I should be glad to give him a daughter's care—no great expression of courtesy, yet, even

as I uttered it, a change came over them. The old man looked pleased, Lady Elmore stern and stiff, and Herbert—I hardly know what term to apply—perhaps regretful.

When unacquainted with the domestic tone of a house, how almost certain one is to say or do something to disturb it. How could I know that, with this ill-assorted pair, you could not openly be the friend of one without drawing down the enmity of the other. As Herbert immediately opened the door, there was nothing for me to do but to follow his mother up the stairs. I was introduced into a room handsomely but heavily furnished, and so large and dreary that I should have been afraid to occupy it alone. It had three stone-mullioned windows, admitting but a moderate amount of light at any time, and just then no sunshine at all, as the aspect was south-east, and the afternoon far advanced. Two doors on one side, at a little distance from each other, opened into two dressing-rooms, Herbert's and mine. In a room beyond mine was another, a kind of ante-room, where my maid was already busy unpacking. The only cheerful room was my dressing-room, which looked modern, having been newly furnished—most probably for me. After a London house, fitted up with all the luxury and elegance that taste or wealth could devise, my present apartment was not inviting. Something of this feeling was probably expressed on my face, as Lady Elmore condescended to remark, in a sort of apologetic tone—

"The house is very old, and has undergone but few changes, having been transmitted from father to son for some generations just as it is, merely renewing what was absolutely worn out. To-day we dine alone, or nearly so, only an intimate friend of mine and a few young people who are staying with us. To-morrow we have a large dinner-party, to make you acquainted with some of our neighbours."

With these remarks Lady Elmore turned to leave me, and I accompanied her to the door, an attention which she acknowledged by relaxing a little in feature, saying as she

left me, "I hope you will know how to make yourself happy with us."

Perhaps the wish, so formally expressed, raised a doubt and conjured up some shadow from the future, which lay just then in gloomy indistinctness. Instead of feeling cheered by the parting words of my mother-in-law, I laid my head against the stone window and wept. Why, I could not exactly tell. Apparently I had all that could be desired. Not one dark spot could I really distinguish in the map of my life, as it lay outspread before me, not one blot could I see to mar the purity of the present page. I had been kindly received by my new relations, and the fresh furniture of my dressing-room indicated a thoughtful consideration for my comfort. What oppressed me, if not the restless cravings of a heart which had not discovered the aim and end of existence, which had within it feelings and capabilities not to be gratified by the purposeless life and frivolous objects which had hitherto constituted my world and its amusements.

To be really happy, one must have something more than a definite aim; the object of pursuit must be worthy of the energies employed. In the life of many, perhaps of all whose tastes are not prematurely turned from sympathy with "things that are lovely and of good report," are moments when aspirations after some unknown good trouble the present. It is vain to say that if not content with such things as we have, we should not be satisfied if in possession of those now desired. However true as an axiom, it fails to meet the question, for these yearnings are often the dawn of a purer and higher life. More frequently we know not the nature of our wants; it is their vague and misty character which perplexes and distresses, sometimes spreading the pall of unaccountable sadness over the joyous hours of youth. To such dreamers and in such moods, how unspeakably valuable is the loving and able parent, or the wise friend, who can touch the bruised spirit with a gentle hand, and indicate the remedy.

I understand now what ailed me; I was ignorant then, and suffered the almost unconscious tears to roll freely down my cheek, until the ringing of a bell disturbed my musings, and my husband entered the room. The sight of him put all dark imaginings to flight, and his remark, "A simple toilet to-day, Una," sent me to my dressing with no other thought than how to gratify his taste. A mauve silk with a *reflet* of white, rich in texture but plainly made, with a white rose in my hair, was the toilet I selected. That completed, I entered the larger dressing-room, where Herbert was waiting for me, and asked, with some expectation of a favourable reply, "Will this do?"

"Beautifully," was his answer, accompanying it with a caress, which charmed away all recollection of the gloomy thoughts which had occupied me half-an-hour before. Had he intended that I should appear to advantage, he could not have done better, as the heightened colour on my cheek and the sparkling light he had called into my eyes, had not subsided when we entered the drawing-room. Several persons were already there. Lord Elmore sat in his chair on one side of the room, and Lady Elmore on the other, in conversation with an elderly lady, to whom she presented me as her "daughter, Mrs. Elmore." Mrs. Stanley was an Honourable, as well as myself, and I may add, wore her dignity more pretentiously than I. Herbert next introduced me to the two Misses Osborne, sitting near, and looking towards a gentleman standing in one of the window embrasures, I recognised my old friend Lionel. With real pleasure I was about to greet him, so pleasant is a friendly face where all beside are strangers; but I had hardly advanced a step towards him, when my good intentions were frustrated. Lionel, giving me a stiff bow, crossed the room and sat down by one of his cousins. Whether Herbert perceived the altered manner of my former favourite, I know not, he never questioned me about it, and at the time invited me to a seat near his mother. At dinner I sat between Lord Elmore and

one of the Misses Osborne, the other sister opposite, next my husband. Lionel, who was placed near Lady Elmore, the other side of his cousin, was not within reach of easy conversation, had I been inclined to forget his palpable rebuff. All my attention was given to Lord Elmore, Miss Osborne being too much taken up with Herbert to assist me. Having made up my mind that a good understanding should subsist between us, I was disappointed at discovering how wearisome was the effort to entertain him. So little response did my best endeavours elicit, that the thought forced itself upon me that Lord Elmore's mind, as well as body, had become greatly enfeebled. The evening, however, passed away, not very pleasantly it may be presumed, as I found myself at its close rejoicing that one out of the appointed number to be spent among my new relations was gone.

The following day I saw little of Lionel, and that little was cold and constrained, not departing from the formal courtesies with which people living in the same house can scarcely dispense. In the afternoon he rode with his cousins, whose ponies had been brought to the Beeches. I drove with Lady Elmore and Mrs. Stanley, and did not put in practice my early-conceived resolution of devoting myself to my father-in-law. At the dressing hour, I told Herbert that I expected him to wait and take me into the drawing-room. He demurred at first, saying that I was a daughter of the house and must learn to go alone ; but afterwards consented to humour me this once, on account of its being my first dinner-party. When dressed, I received his approbation, but this time had to tender the caress myself. Lionel and the young ladies were already in the room when we entered; the only guest yet arrived was Mr. Norris, whom I was glad to meet again, and especially to learn that he was going to spend a few days with us. The others speedily followed, about twenty of the principal people in the neighbourhood, to whom I was introduced with due form and ceremony.

As compensation for a very uninteresting neighbour at dinner on the one side, I had Mr. Norris on the other, and managed to extract amusement from his caustic remarks—forgetting that the shafts so skilfully directed against others might, on occasion, be pointed as cleverly against me or mine. This evening proved less wearisome than the first; indeed, what with music and conversation, it had not been unpleasant at all. Lionel, maintaining his sulky attitude, kept away from me; but I had succeeded in securing Mr. Norris as a companion, who both amused and interested me.

Nine o'clock was the nominal breakfast hour at the Beeches. At that time Lady Elmore was ready to preside and act the beneficent hostess; those who came down late were expected to entertain themselves. It was the only meal at which Lord Elmore did not appear. The following morning, after breakfast was over, having nothing to do, I thought of paying him a visit. Herbert was going to Henley to visit some boating friends, and Lionel had organised a fishing party in the park, to which, as it seemed to me, I was intentionally uninvited.

"How far is it to Henley? Can you not take me with you?" I asked Herbert, on meeting him in the hall, perceiving a nondescript carriage, designated a "trap," brought to the door just as I was passing.

"Henley is about nine miles distant. No, I cannot take you; there is only room for two, and I want the groom to-day," replied Herbert, carelessly. He was putting on his gloves.

"When shall you be back?" I asked.

"In time for dinner, of course. My mother has another of her dinner-parties in your honour," he replied, with a slight laugh, and walked towards the door without noticing my disappointment.

Perhaps I was unreasonable, foolishly sensitive. Without reflecting that my husband must naturally have his old associations and schemes of amusement in the home

and neighbourhood where he had been brought up, I was annoyed, first at being left at home, next—I am ashamed to record anything so puerile, yet it is true—I was vexed that the reason assigned for his return was his mother's pleasure and not mine.

On entering Lord Elmore's room, half-an-hour afterwards, I found his servant preparing to take him out, and brought a smile to his faded features by expressing an intention to accompany him.

"In five minutes I shall be ready, and will go with you," said I, moved to kindness by the helplessness to which the master of this fair domain was reduced; his trial increased, as it appeared to me, by receiving so little consideration from those nearest to him.

"That would be very unwise," said a voice behind me. "Lord Elmore goes chiefly in the sunshine, which would be far from agreeable to you. The air is already very warm."

Lady Elmore had entered the room, and having heard what I had proposed, endeavoured to put her veto upon it.

Although I had not been forty-eight hours in the house, it was evident enough, not only that Lady Elmore bore rule, but that the heavy hand of constant repression lay upon her husband's wishes and feelings; nor did it appear that the poor invalid had any one to help him. Herbert, though kind in speech, was careless in action, nor had I as yet remarked the smallest inclination to oppose or check his mother, though he could not but observe that Lord Elmore, under her rigid sway, was reduced to a cipher even under his own roof. Combativeness must have been radical in my character. A hot July sun was not inviting for a walk, yet Lady Elmore's suggestion, as to the desirableness of carrying out my intention, only made me more determined on attempting it. As I was leaving the room for that purpose, she stopped me, saying—

"A word with you, Una. All our guests expect atten-

tion; it is scarcely good breeding to occupy yourself with one, to the exclusion of others, as you did last night."

A slight reprimand from an elder to a younger, gracefully received, generally attracts regard and paves the way towards friendship. It was a real misfortune that I had never been taught submission to my elders, but petted and spoilt, until opposition assumed the aspect of unkindness, and counsel, of unnecessary interference. Had I acknowledged the justness of Lady Elmore's remark, or even received it in silence, no displeasure would have been kindled on either side, and the subject would have dropped; but I fancied that she loved power, and was resolved that she should not exercise it over me. As Miss Randolph, I was allowed my own way—a matron now, I certainly did not intend to be schooled.

"Mr. Norris was the most agreeable," I answered, quickly, without perceiving that the excuse given only served to strengthen her hand.

"Precisely so, and therefore ordinary breeding required you to thwart a little your own inclinations in favour of those less gifted."

I was sick of expressions respecting good-breeding and etiquette, thinking they were always brought forward to check me in the indulgence of every natural feeling, and answered sharply, "Good-breeding, as it is termed, seems to me to signify with some people, insincerity and gloss—a fashionable substitute for the heart with those who have the misfortune to be born without one."

Lady Elmore made no reply; like her son in that respect, she would not bandy words, but suffered me to retire vexed and repentant as usual, when, my little ebullition over, reason resumed her place.

By way of concession I did not follow Lord Elmore in the sun, but took a stroll in the delicious shade of the trees, until I reached the lake. A portion of it was in shadow, and there the party were occupied in fishing, Lionel a little

way from the others, brought nearly opposite to them by a bend of the water.

Desirous of making friends with him, and perceiving that if my wishes were to be carried out, I must take the initiative, I walked up to him and said, "How long are you going to sulk with me, Lionel? What is the use of it?"

Without answering, he appeared absorbed in examining the hook on his line, which he had drawn out of the water on my approach. A slight increase of colour and a movement about the mouth indicated both feeling and irresolution.

"Can't you persuade Lady Mayfort to a reconciliation?" I asked. "I loved her dearly. I want my friend back again—all my friends; I am too poor without them."

"Impossible," was his answer. The impossible referred to his aunt; the glance he gave told me plainly that his kindness had returned. Poor Lionel! his nature was a true one of its kind, and deserved better treatment at my hands than he received.

Before another word could be exchanged, Mr. Norris threw his line so far that it became entangled in that of Lionel's, bringing him round to my side in order to extricate it.

"Will you have a rod, Mrs. Elmore? I can lend you mine."

"Thank you, Mr. Norris," I replied, "I am not patient enough for fishing; I will help Lionel—I will hold the basket for his spoils. See! he has caught something."

At that moment Lionel drew a fish out of the water, and was certainly not inclined to discourage my offers of assistance, though the aid given amounted to nothing, I being so unwilling to touch the fish, that I let the lid shut too quickly, and falling on the ground, it nearly floundered back into the water.

"Mr. Norris! Mr. Norris! come directly—I have a bite," called out one of the Misses Osborne.

"Not so loud; you will frighten all the rest of the fish

away," answered Mr. Norris, and looking at me, added, as he moved off to join the young ladies, "They forget that water being a conductor of sound, a whisper even may sometimes be heard across it."

Was this a hint to me to make no confidences? I thought so, and talked no more to Lionel about his coldness, nor indeed was there any occasion; after the few words already spoken, it had vanished and was soon forgotten.

About four o'clock, Mr. Norris, Lionel, and one of his cousins, went for a ride together, which made me rather envious; the other sister drove with Lady Elmore and Mrs. Stanley. I declined, and remained at home, passing the time with Lord Elmore, who though pleased to see me about him, was very difficult to amuse, and did not appear to appreciate my exertions as much as I expected. When tired, I repaired to my room and dressed early, having nothing else to do. My toilet completed, I was lounging on the sofa with a book to beguile the time, when my husband appeared at the door just as the dressing-bell was ringing. A wise and good wife would of course have hoped that he had passed a pleasant day, and might have been rewarded by some little word of tenderness in return. Unhappily, I was neither wise nor good, and was, besides, full of my own grievances, and sore at what my foolish fancy designated neglect on his part, in leaving me nearly the whole day alone with perfect strangers. Notwithstanding his presence always brought me pleasure, I chose to manifest complete indifference on this occasion, hoping that some demonstration of kindness or surprise would come from him. As usual, I had miscalculated. Making me a sign to dismiss the maid, who was still busy "putting away," he sat down till she had gone, and then said, his voice low and sweet as usual, but with an expression of annoyance on his face—

"What is this misunderstanding with my mother, Una? She says you are wanting in proper respect to her, and she expects me to teach you better. Nothing would vex me

more than to have to interfere between you. I have told her what I now tell you, never to appeal to me. If you must have disagreements, settle them yourselves, I will have nothing to say to them. The wisest course is not to have any. Be a little conciliating yourself, and I think you will not find my mother either unreasonable or exacting—remember, you are the younger."

He was going away, when my reply stopped him. "I cannot allow your mother to rule me as she does your father. I have been accustomed to my own way all my life, and will not brook dictation—at least, not her's," I added, hastily, having a vague feeling that these were not quite appropriate words for a husband's ear.

"Not her's, and not any one's, I am afraid," he added.

"I am willing to oblige, but not to obey," I replied.

"Then oblige us by being reasonable and agreeable, and let me have a quiet life," he said, rather sarcastically, as he went away.

Herbert was good-natured and careless, but not intentionally unkind. Scenes of all description he disliked. Taking life easily himself, he was willing to let others do the same. He had no desire to impose a burden on me, or unnecessarily to restrict my pleasures; but one thing was certain, mine must not interfere with his. He wished me to be happy, yet I must learn to create my happiness for the most part in the society and things that surrounded me. It pleased him when I was bright and gay, but he had no sympathy for tears—no kind word to chase away morbid fancies or discontented murmurs. Had my own character been better trained we might have been happy together. Had I, as many a sensible wife has done, accepted what was good in my husband, and shown my affection by cultivating forbearance and patience towards failings I could not alter, instead of demanding what was not in his nature to give, and so bitterly resenting the disappointment I experienced, some of the most poignant sorrows of my life would

have been spared me. Also, as I am now able to see, the very object I so earnestly desired would have been attained. Ah me! I was very young and very foolish, high-spirited, sensitive, and passionate, with no curb but my affection, no better guide than the dictates of my own heart and the ordinary rules by which society is chiefly governed. I was not fitted to cope with a position requiring so much self-restraint and tact. Failing the infallible Guide, who would have brought me safely through greater difficulties than those I had to encounter, I was the sport of my own feelings, judging things not as they were or ought to be, but after my own passions, prejudices, and wishes. A little while will show the shoals and quicksands among which my ignorant and wilful steerage forced the bark of my life's hopes and happiness.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MISADVENTURE.

ONCE reconciled, Lionel and I became great friends again. He, more than any one else, exerted himself to make the time pass pleasantly at the Beeches. Remembering my liking for riding, he soon proposed that one of his cousins should resign her horse to me, Lord Elmore's stables not furnishing one accustomed to carry a lady, and Herbert would not permit me to make an experiment. Agnes Osborne willingly consenting, I enjoyed my first ride very much. The country about was wooded and interesting, and my companions agreeable. When the same proposition was repeated the following day, I demurred, feeling that it was not fair to purchase my enjoyment at the cost of another.

"Why not have your own horse down? you had one last season, I know," said Mr. Norris, who was standing by, and overheard my scruples. "Why not ask your husband about it? Here he comes."

At that moment Herbert joined us, and having caught the sound of his name, looked inquiringly from one to the other. I was silent. Mr. Norris's words jarred me. In such matters I had long been accustomed to decide for myself. With my father, the mere expression of my wishes was sufficient to ensure their accomplishment. I had not yet adopted the idea of allegiance to another. My altar-vow had no particular signification, or rather, had never yet been regarded by me as a principle of action. I loved my husband passionately—with a jealous, unreasoning affection.

A little tenderness on his side, and I should have been his willing and devoted slave; for him I would have cheerfully resigned much that I loved best—everything, if he could have paid the price I desired. I loved him dearly, and coveted an equal return. That part of my duty came easily enough. "To honour and obey," unsatisfied as I was, involved something quite different—nothing less than holding my own disposition and temper in such wholesome check, that my will should never clash with his. For this I was altogether unprepared.

Not feeling disposed to answer his appealing glance in the way Mr. Norris suggested, I remained silent, and the latter spoke.

"Mrs. Elmore likes riding, and objects to monopolise Miss Osborne's horse; I have therefore just proposed her asking you to send for her own."

"Certainly, if she wishes it," said Herbert, with careless readiness; "though I do not see much use in it. Lionel is the only one here who rides much, and when he leaves, she will not have much opportunity."

"Sometimes with you, I suppose, since riding is a great pleasure to her," replied Mr. Norris, with a certain accent which I felt must be displeasing to my husband. Nor was I wrong, for he turned away with a heightened colour.

Poor Herbert! he was willing enough to give me pleasure when it involved no sacrifice on his own part. Like me, he knew not the duty and the pleasure of self-sacrificing love.

Alphabet was sent for, and after a few days arrived. Herbert rode with us once, but boating was his favourite amusement, and being only about nine miles from Henley, he spent much of his leisure there. The Regatta was shortly to take place. Being first man in one of the boats engaged, he had ample excuse to justify his absence from home.

Where pleasure in one form or another constitutes the principal object, even if not altogether frivolous in its

character, life loses its greatest charm. The sweet excitement and refined happiness of a spirit in the realisation of its noble purposes for the good and happiness of others is unknown. The wretched substitute, sought in a feverish chase after amusements, has failed, and always will fail, to give an abiding sense of peace and contentment.

We hear sometimes of "an iron fate" pursuing an individual from the cradle to the grave. I have learnt to believe that where there is indeed such a pursuit, the iron fate has been called into being by impulses and passions but feebly restrained. This conviction so painfully and, for me, at such a costly price acquired, I would willingly impart to others were it possible, and spare them the experimental learning of the bitter lesson. But none, or very few, can profit by the experience of others. In the drama of life each one has a distinct part to act, though the principles applicable are the same for all.

Those who, like Timothy, have been early reared in Scripture teaching, need not my counsels; others will not readily heed them; while some must learn for themselves the truth that "the fashion of this world passeth away," and that vanity is, and ever will be, written on every hope and project that has no other foundation than the shifting sands of time.

It may be readily imagined that these were not my thoughts at that time of my history of which I am now writing. Had they been so, the pages would have been much fairer and my life much happier. If not one of the most thoughtless of the votaries of pleasure, still my mind had no definite object of pursuit, no fixed standard by which to measure the value of my occupations. I was content to float along the stream, snatching with a hasty hand the flowers I could find upon its bank, never caring to sow the useful seed which might flourish and replace, as time passed on, what was already gathered or had died away.

About four o'clock, when the heat of the day had a little subsided, Lionel and I, with one, sometimes with both, of the Misses Osborne, generally started for a ride, leaving Lady Elmore to enjoy a sober *tête-à-tête* drive with her friend.

The Misses Osborne were nice, unaffected country girls, especially Agnes, who I thought evinced no small partiality for her cousin ; and Lionel was to me, as before, almost like a brother. Occasionally Mr. Norris came over to luncheon, and joined us afterwards in our ride. His place —called Holmewood Bury, on account of an old ruin in the park, said once to have formed part of an ancient abbey— was about seven miles distant. The woods, being extensive and containing many fine points of view, often tempted us in that direction. At Miss Osborne's request, Mr. Norris had promised to give a *déjeûner* in the ruins, and all our party—except Lord Elmore, who never left home—had engaged to be present. In our rides, partly to please Agnes, partly because I liked to free myself from attentions which sometimes wearied me, I often rode in advance of the rest of the party with Miss Osborne, and from her learned many particulars of the neighbourhood. Mr. Norris, more than any other, excited my curiosity. He was a rich man, about thirty years of age, and unmarried. Notwithstanding a great deal of cynicism, and much apparent contempt for woman's intellect, a peculiar aptitude for discovering the weak points in all arguments, characters, and people, a great amount of prejudice, and a dogged adherence to an opinion once formed, I perceived in him a disposition to be kind to real suffering, and indulgent wherever he recognised sincerity. He interested me. With regret I made the discovery that a rooted dislike existed between him and my husband—deeper on his side than on Herbert's, the latter being so naturally easy that some powerful stimulus was necessary ere his enmity could be aroused.

"What do you know of Mr. Norris's history?" I asked, as, issuing from a green lane, we proceeded leisurely along the high road. "Has he ever been crossed in love?"—that being the first idea that rises to a woman's mind.

"I believe so," answered Miss Osborne; "and report says that to this day he mourns the faithless one, whose image he wears next his heart."

"That is a tale people are very fond of relating, and it is generally an invention; I do not believe it," I replied with warmth, though, whether true or not, it could make no difference to me. "I don't believe it. Mr. Norris is not a man to yield to such a weakness. If a woman scorned him, he would scorn her, and there would be the end of the story."

"You think, then, that he would not cherish an unrequited attachment?" said Miss Osborne. "Are you speaking of him in particular, or of all men?"

"Of him," I replied. "Like most of his class, I believe he would be ensnared by the first clever and foolish woman who thought it worth her while to make the attempt and persevered long enough."

I do not know why I formed such an opinion, still less why I presumed to give it. Words are such idle things, often forgotten by the speaker as soon as uttered, yet they float away, bearing their seed far and wide, like the thistle-down carried by the breeze.

"Let us have a canter," was Miss Osborne's reply, and applying the whip, lightly as she supposed, but heavily as it appeared, she was off on a hard gallop. Alphabet followed, and not choosing to be outdone, being besides a more powerful horse, dashed forward, and was soon beyond control.

Just then Lady Elmore's carriage, previously concealed by a turn in the road, came in sight, giving her the alarming spectacle of seeing Miss Osborne and myself riding apparently a reckless race. By drawing up a little across the road, her coachman attempted to make a kind of barrier. Alphabet tore by close to a stony bank, leaving a part of my

habit on a projecting branch fixed in the bank; while Miss Osborne, more fortunate than myself, was stopped by the footman, who, having dismounted, made a successful snatch at her bridle.

Not daring to follow, lest the sound of his horse's feet should but accelerate my furious pace, Lionel could only ride slowly so as to keep me in sight, while the others watched us for a time in fear and dismay. At first the movement was exciting. Like the mason falling from Strasburg Cathedral, I might almost have said—"Pourvu que cela dure;" but shortly, tree, brushwood, bank, and sky mingled together in one indistinct mass; my breath was failing; my eyes, which I had endeavoured to fix straight before me, began to close, and I to hope that I might come to the ground between some of the heaps of stones piled up at the sides of the road. From being heaps they soon appeared continuous lines, so rapid was the movement. With a feeble hand I endeavoured to guide my horse from the side into the middle of the road, and found that he swayed a little in the direction desired; another attempt, and he obeyed the bridle and slackened his pace. Hearing no pursuit, or only the measured tread of Lionel's horse, his mad speed was over. Turning himself round, panting, breathless, and exhausted, I easily enough now rode slowly back, made more sensible of the danger I had incurred by the pallor of Lionel's cheeks than by the fatigue experienced.

"Oh! Mrs. Elmore, how you terrified us!" was his exclamation, as, alighting, he came up to me and stroked my still startled horse, at the same time examining the girths and rearranging my torn and disordered habit, and all this so slowly as to give us both time to recover our composure before joining the others.

Lady Elmore could not do otherwise than animadvert on my imprudence, and gave me some severe advice to be more careful how I rode about lanes and roads like a wild country girl, instead of observing the decorum to be expected from

her son's wife. The lecture ended, she offered me a seat in the carriage, supposing me to be tired—a consideration I declined, preferring freedom with fatigue to rest and chiding. Certain that she would complain to Herbert, and perhaps raise difficulties respecting the continuance of the only enjoyment to be obtained at the Beeches, I felt it needful to have the first word with him if I could, knowing well that the first would have the most influence. For that purpose, on reaching the house, notwithstanding my weariness, I repaired to his own room on the ground floor, next his father's—a sort of rough dressing and writing room, composed of two pieces, as the French say. It was an odd-and-end apartment, where he wrote sometimes—though he was no scribe, and indulged himself in a very limited correspondence—smoked, received his gentlemen friends, and, in fact, considered himself safe from intrusion. He was not there, so sitting down I waited his return, satisfied that unless his mother waylaid him in the hall—a circumstance not likely to occur to one of her dignified habits—my object was already gained. There was only one thing against me. Finding himself late, he might go at once to his dressing-room upstairs, and there encounter Lady Elmore. Fortune favoured me. In a few minutes he opened the door and almost started back.

"Una, what brings you here? It is your dressing time."

"True, but I have first a word to say to you."

"Not here; I want no lady-visitors in my sanctum."

"Yes, here, in your sanctum, Herbert. You must listen to what I have to say," I replied, decidedly. "Your mother will find a way of making you hear her, why should not your wife have an equal chance?"

"If a matter of complaint, I refuse to listen. You know very well I told you so the other day. I will have nothing to do with your quarrels; whatever differences arise between you, settle them yourselves;" and he opened the door for me to leave the room.

"If you will not hear me, neither must you listen to her," I answered quickly, perceiving and pushing my advantage.

"I told her the same thing; I will have no complaint from either of you. What a perpetual turmoil I should be in, if obliged to keep the peace between two such women!" he added, with some asperity.

"Keep your word, that is all I wish, all I came to ask;" and with this I left his room, casting on him a glance of triumph as I passed.

"Una, Una, come back!" I heard him call after me, but I hurried on as though I had not heard him. For once my calculations were correct, and my diplomacy successful. The newly raised curiosity, however, found no opportunity for its gratification, as I kept the maid about me till the last minute, leaving it to gather strength by waiting.

On descending to the drawing-room, Mrs. Stanley hoped I had recovered from my fright—a sensation I had never acknowledged—and Lady Elmore trusted that my husband would not be so foolishly indulgent to my whims, but would make me more reasonably alive to the proprieties of my position.

"What is it all about?" asked Lord Elmore, as my husband entered, perceiving from Lady Elmore's dignified manner that I was considered in the wrong. Though incapable of offering resistance for himself, he would sometimes aggravate matters by taking my part.

"Come here, Una, and tell me what is the matter. You look pale and ill," he said, speaking slowly, as usual.

Herbert came up, and stood before the chair on which, thus invited, I seated myself, so concealing me from the rest in the room.

"My horse ran away with me, and Lady Elmore thinks that I ought to have had strength enough to hold him in," I answered, without looking away from Lord Elmore, believing that he would not detect the temper of the answer.

"No, she thinks you ought not to have placed yourself

in such a situation—you should ride more quietly," said Lady Elmore, with a calmness rarely disturbed.

"People don't usually let their horses run away with them if they can help it; there is always a little danger in the thing," I answered, tartly, fast approaching that wordy warfare so distasteful to Herbert, and which he considered so plebeian; but anger at her persistent blame was quickly taking possession of me. Unable to share her rigid sense of propriety, or understand that a canter or even a gallop was a violation of it, I was inclined to do battle for my personal liberty. Herbert, giving me a vexed look, and saying something in a low voice intended only for my ear about my never learning discretion, moved away, letting me plainly see that the hasty words just uttered had extinguished the interest which my unusual pallor, and the parts of the conversation he had overheard, had created.

"Una does not eat anything," said Lord Elmore, whose neighbour I was, fussing himself about me, the only property in which he seemed permitted to claim a part. "I fear she is not happy at the Beeches."

The words were addressed to Herbert, but Lady Elmore took them up, and replied with some bitterness—unintentionally striking her son in her eagerness to assail her husband—"If so, one must suppose that she is undergoing the inevitable fate of those ladies unfortunate enough to be connected by marriage with the Elmore family."

The full meaning of her words was veiled from me, but I soon experienced in her softened manner a beneficial effect from the allusion. Pressing me to eat with unwonted kindness, she recommended one dish after another, until, ashamed to decline, I forced myself to make some exertion to please her. The greatest change in all was in Herbert. Forgetting the petulance before dinner, he sought me out afterwards, inquired into the particulars of the riding misadventure, and was so kind, almost tender, in his solicitude about my health, that there was no difficulty in extracting

from him a promise to drive me in his own trap to the breakfast at Holmewood on the following day—a pleasure highly prized, as since our arrival at the Beeches he had never accompanied me in this *tête-à-tête* fashion to any party of amusement.

Lord Elmore's speech, which at its utterance made me nervous, exciting a fear that an observation coming from him would be badly received by Lady Elmore, and instead of awakening interest, might increase displeasure —had, contrary to my expectation, wrought an opposite effect, a circumstance unintelligible then, but, read by the acquired light of their social history, clearer now. Family secrets are rarely so closely kept but that some particle oozes out. A rumour reached me of great wrong suffered by Lady Elmore at the hands of her lord, early turning the softer feelings of her heart into hardness, thus in a measure accounting for the stony nature so unsympathetic with my own. Perhaps an introspective glance directed towards her own history, removed for the time the asperity which she had evinced towards me. She was a woman, after all, and could not be untrue to nature. Some womanliness of feeling might have been kindled by my youth, associated by Lord Elmore's speech with her own sadness under the Elmore roof. We were all tender once, and could we raise the veil drawn over each other's inner life, we should be more slow to condemn, and more abounding in pity for that hardness which so often gathers round increasing years. With a little confidence on her part, and less prejudice on mine, she might have been to me the friend I sorely needed, and have been able to turn the current of my life into a less rugged channel. That was not to be, we had conceived for each other a mutual dislike, founded on misapprehension of character. For that evening she was all kindness; whatever change in her manner arose afterwards, truth compels me to own that the principal blame lay at my own door.

CHAPTER V.

THE BREAKFAST.

ON one of the last days of July I awoke with a most pleasant though indefinite feeling of coming happiness. The impression acquired more distinctness as I became more thoroughly awake. I soon remembered that this was the day fixed for the *déjeûner* at Holmewood, and that Herbert was to be my special companion both there and back. The morning appeared to be perfection for our excursion. It was warm, with a fresh breeze stirring, bringing with it through my open window the indescribable perfume of summer. Herbert was to drive me over to Holmewood. We were to be alone. Though seldom demonstrative himself, he would submit with tolerable grace to my demonstrations when no one was present, yet, even then, when I sought response, he was always chary of his own expression of affection. What could I do? Response was essential to my happiness, and to demand it was my nature. Some natures know no intensity—mine, unhappily, knew it too well.

The postman's bag was daily laid on the side-table at the breakfast hour. Both Herbert and Lady Elmore possessed a key, and the one or the other opened it each morning and distributed its contents. Being late, the letters had found their owners before I came down.

"Any letter from my father?" I asked, looking at Herbert, who had just opened one that lay before him.

"No; this is from Henley."

"We need not inquire after Mrs. Elmore this morning,

she is looking particularly well, with not even a trace of yesterday's fright," remarked Mrs. Stanley.

"Thank you, I am quite well," I replied. Happiness is a great beautifier, of that my glass had already informed me, and I was in high spirits.

"Herbert, I should like some pigeon-pie." My wishes met with instant attention, in all such matters he was blameless. It was a pity that I could not content myself with a general kindness of manner. Alas! my heart sought more. After breakfast he followed me into my room.

"I find I cannot go with you to-day, Una; so will you drive with my mother and Mrs. Stanley, or would you like best to ride with the Misses Osborne and Lionel?"

He spoke with provoking calmness, totally unconscious of the deep disappointment I experienced, merely as if proposing an ordinary alternative, not a substitution for a pleasure which had already in anticipation brought me an unaccustomed joy. Strange that an incident so apparently trifling should affect me so deeply! The first sensation was a general chill, my thoughts and feelings seemed to stand still, and I looked at him fixedly, hardly able to believe what I had heard. The disappointment was so great that I felt inclined to cry—very childish, yet I wish I had yielded to that first inclination rather than to the impression which succeeded it. Deep down in my bosom rose the conviction that my husband did not love me; that whilst I had given him the great wealth of affection I had to bestow, he had nothing real, scarcely even a counterfeit to offer me; that the investment I had made in the future, once so rich in promise to my sanguine disposition, would be bankruptcy—utter bankruptcy, if I knew not how to use the little interest I then possessed.

He had not sat down, and awaited my answer in the attitude of one in a hurry to leave, being quite unconscious of the coming storm.

"You do not care a bit about me or my feelings!" I passionately exclaimed. "You never loved me, Herbert, or you would not be so selfish, and so indifferent to what makes or mars my happiness!"

"What has happened? What are you dreaming about?" asked Herbert, opening his eyes in genuine surprise at this unexpected ebullition of wrath. "You surely are not angry because I cannot go with you this morning? Did I not explain that this being the day preceding the Regatta, there are a few preliminary matters to arrange, and being one of the principals on the committee, I cannot absent myself. The fact that I had forgotten this when I promised to drive you to Holmewood shows at least what were my intentions. The letter, however, I received this morning will quite prevent me from fulfilling them. I am sorry you permit such a trifle to affect you so deeply; pray do not be so foolish as to raise an every-day incident into importance. I might as well speak of your present opposition as wanting in duty and affection, only I could not bring myself to utter such an absurdity."

"You do not love me!—you never have really loved me!" I continued, vehemently. "You cannot, dare not, swear that my happiness is of any moment to you compared with your own wishes and your own pleasure."

"Were it not arguing in a circle, I might easily retort the accusation, as you are at this moment giving it practical force. However, let that pass. He is a silly man who suffers his wife to drag him into a strife of words. I am sorry to disappoint you, since your heart is set upon my driving you to Holmewood."

"Not the drive only," I answered, impatiently, "but your absence disappoints me. You are always willing to find your pleasure away from me."

Such petulant reproaches would have conveyed but one meaning to some husbands, and sufficient sweetness would have been found in the strong attachment indicated to

excuse the sharpness of the tone in which they were pronounced. Had Herbert been inclined to take that view, and humour me with some gentle word, my angry face and flashing eye would speedily have changed his feelings.

"Do not make a mountain of a mole-hill, Una," he said, quickly. "I would go with you if I could—I cannot. I shall meet you at dinner—what is the absence of a few hours? Go and enjoy yourself. Will you ride with Miss Osborne or drive with my mother?"

"Go and enjoy yourself;" that was easily said—easy for him to do at any time, but at the present moment the recommendation only added fuel to the fire which was already kindled. Possibly my nerves had not recovered the strain of the previous day, the physical disturbance having, as it usually does, affected the balance of mind. Reflection to any good purpose was then out of my power, and self-control I did not attempt to exercise. In my present state of mind, the thought that I might be so easily consoled was nothing better than an aggravation of my vexation, and an additional proof of Herbert's indifference.

His surprises were not over. Instead of giving the answer for which he waited, I broke forth into violent invective against him and all the Elmore family as heartless, selfish, and unendurable—declared that I would not be of the party at all that day—that I would remain at home alone—have all my boxes packed up, and return to my father, a threat the most foolish and undignified that a wife could have uttered.

Herbert made no reply, he was self-contained, and rarely met wrath with wrath. It was one day my lot to discover that silence under provocation does not signify forgiveness, and that in the debtor and creditor account daily passing between those who dwell together, the effort necessary to maintain composure may be an overpowering item against the offender. No reasoning at that time could have reached my understanding; my ear was closed except to the voice

of my own senseless passion, which I continued to work up to a higher pitch even after he left me. The door was no sooner closed than, giving way to a violent flood of tears—hot scalding tears that blistered without relieving—I yielded myself up to a prolonged indulgence of grief. This by degrees subsiding, I began to listen for sounds from without or below. My room looking out upon the lawn at the back of the house, I could neither see the arrivals nor the departures, but I could easily distinguish the sound of wheels if any carriage came out of the stable-yard. As yet no sound had reached me; Herbert must still be in the house, notwithstanding his eagerness to go to Henley. Would he return and speak to me once more, or would he, for the first time in our married life, quit me in anger. Had it not been for the compressed lip and fixed expression of the eye with which he quitted the room, I might have hoped to see him again. Never before had I ruffled the smooth bright surface which his bearing habitually presented, and which, like many of his acquaintances, I had regarded as characteristic of his mind. I had to learn that there is sometimes a power of will, requiring only circumstances for its development, which one is unprepared to find latent beneath the blue eyes whose usual expression is so sunny and tranquil.

At length I heard a sound, it was the large carriage rumbling over the stones; then came the lighter wheels of Herbert's trap. A few minutes longer and both carriages drove off. The morning had worn away—it was now nearly twelve o'clock; Herbert had taken me at my word, and I was to be left at home alone. Before I had made up my mind whether to be pleased or displeased at this arrangement, a knock announced a visitor, and Agnes Osborne entered.

Without showing any surprise at the appearance I presented, though tears to me were especially disfiguring, she sat down by me, saying, "Mr. Elmore sent me to say

that your horse was ordered with mine. We and Lionel ride. Olivia is gone in the carriage with Lady Elmore, preferring to make a more elaborate toilet than we Amazons can perform."

"Mr. Elmore need not have taken that trouble," I replied, coldly, "as I told him it was not my intention to go to Holmewood."

"You will not surely deprive yourself and us of a pleasure because——" she hesitated.

I looked at her, quickly. We were about the same age, yet in my own estimation my matronly position left her much too young to be on an equality.

Herbert having converted her into a messenger, had perhaps let fall some word of blame which I might not be disposed to accept. With porcupine instinct the quills of opposition were already rising as I repeated, "Because——"

"Because of some little matrimonial squabble," she answered, with a piquant smile. "My dear Mrs. Elmore, such things are inevitable—they are the lining of the wedding-ring; you must not mind them. In your place I should look upon them as a portion of married life—inseparable—to be calculated upon beforehand. They are little episodes with just sufficient pungent seasoning to prevent too much sweetness from cloying the appetite." Perceiving that I turned impatiently from her badinage, she added, more seriously, "Two people living together can never entirely agree. Look at sisters, look at brothers—all families are subject to these little disruptions. Olivia and I sometimes dispute furiously over the colour of a bonnet or the trimming of a dress, but we love each other all the same."

"That is a very different thing," I answered, with some disdain, at what appeared so inappropriate a comparison. "You are speaking without experience. Between a husband and wife, disagreements are much more serious."

"Only if you choose to make them so, which I would

not do. When I had said all I had to say, I would make friends again. You know the quarrel cannot be earnest if the adage be true—'A man and his wife make but one individual,' for it takes two to make a quarrel."

I thought her argument very poor, and herself unfitted to form an opinion; but my sensitiveness was not wounded, and my displeasure was sufficiently appeased to shake my resolution of remaining at home. "What message did Herbert send?" I asked, disposed to listen with more amiability than I had done at first.

"Will you tell Mrs. Elmore that I have ordered her horse, concluding she will prefer riding to going in the carriage with Mrs. Stanley and my mother," she repeated, slowly, evidently striving to execute her commission verbatim.

"I thought Herbert was eager to be at Henley; what made him start so late?" I asked, suspecting the reason, but wishing to ascertain if anything had been said on the subject.

"Well, so said Lady Elmore, but he appeared seized with a dutiful fit, and expressed his intention of seeing the carriage off first. Mr. Elmore, be it observed, never likes to be questioned, even by his mother. I think she never had him taught the Catechism when young. He always avoids categorical answers and explanations—nor can I say he is wrong; the former are something of a ring-fence, and the latter often irritate a gnat-bite into a wound."

I had no doubt that Herbert had made an effort to keep Lady Elmore and me apart till time had a little cooled my excitement, fearing the effects of collision in my present mood between two such uncongenial tempers. Agnes' good sense began to make way with me. I acknowledged the wisdom of her remarks, and wondered whence she had obtained it. Enough I possessed myself to perceive the folly of irritating a gnat-bite into a wound; but not enough to descend into my own heart and tear up the roots of

those wild, wayward feelings which, unchecked, send up such noxious weeds to the surface. I did not know, nor could I then have been taught, that happiness depends less upon others than ourselves, less upon external condition than state of mind; that the thorns which pierce through the nest are often of our own planting, and still oftener would never have penetrated the down which lines it, had not our hands pressed too heavily upon them. Alas! alas! what a flavour of bitterness sometimes lies in the fruit of that wisdom gathered in the fields of retrospection!

Agnes, with her pretty ways and soft voice, talked me into good-humour; I consented to go, though in reality unfit for the exertion. My fierce displeasure was over, yet the effects remained in my aching temples, strained nerves, and still agitated frame. It would have been wiser and better to remain at home, and undergo the healing process of quiet and repose; but such a resolution, after the threat of the morning, would have appeared like temper, and I preferred the hazard of illness to a false imputation.

That great consequences spring out of small occurrences we are all ready to admit; perhaps we are as willing to forget that the shaping of these incidents is the work of our own hands. The evil is not in the temptation so much as in listening to the voice of the tempter, permitting him to tamper with those elements of character which, rightly directed, would have baffled his efforts.

I said it would have been better for me not to go to Holmewood, regarding that expedition as the introduction to some of the most disastrous occurrences of my life—it being our natural instinct to blame circumstances rather than ourselves. Events take their tone and colour from character—with such a disposition as mine, if not this visit to Holmewood, something else would have developed the evil ready to germinate; for, where there is a living root, shoots will spring up, whether the parent stem be weed or flower. Yet with the innate tendency to self-deception that few have the

courage to withstand, like many others I was often glad to trace the effects of faults, really my own, to causes over which I fancied I had no control; in other words, to accidental circumstances, that convenient phraseology so frequently used to cover our wilful blindness.

Urged by Agnes, I determined to go to the breakfast, and being late, owing to the tardiness of my decision, we rode fast in order to overtake the others. Within half-an-hour's distance of the Bury, I felt so ill as to be unable to proceed further, and was compelled to appeal to my companions, entreating them to make a halt for me to recover myself.

Lionel, with many words of solicitude, was instantly at my side. "Would I be taken from my horse and go into a neighbouring cottage for rest? Would I have some water? Could he do anything for me?" To all this I returned a feeble negative, and the assurance that, feeling only great fatigue, I should be better after a little repose. When well enough to proceed, I exacted a promise to say nothing of my indisposition at the Bury, and especially to keep it from Lady Elmore—a useless precaution on my part, as, on our arrival, being unable to stand, I was obliged to cling to Lionel for support in almost silent helplessness, only finding words sufficient to ask to be laid upon some sofa out of the way of the other guests.

Cognizant of the ways and corners of the house, he pushed open a door at the farther end of the hall, and half led, half carried me into the room, followed by Agnes.

The one I had so unceremoniously entered was Mr. Norris' study—containing books and papers, in what ladies would call a very great litter, but which probably to the owner represented perfect order. There were no luxuries, only a few necessaries—tables, chairs, and all kinds of receptacles for books. Fortunately, an old leathern sofa occupied a prominent position, not of the elegant, comfortless style now so general, but an old-fashioned, antedated

contrivance with large pillows, and so constructed that the sight of it even was suggestive of repose.

"Now, go away, and report yourselves," I said, attempting to smile, as I sunk down among the supporting cushions. "Make an apology to Mr. Norris, and don't let Lady Elmore come to me. Tell her I shall soon be better, and will then join the others."

In a few minutes Agnes returned, accompanied by Mr. Norris, and, immediately behind him, Lady Elmore, who was the first to speak.

"You have been foolishly riding too fast, again," she said, approaching the sofa, taking precedence of the others, and addressing me in her usual dignified manner. "You would have done better to have come in the carriage."

"Perhaps," I answered, willing for her to take my reply for acquiescence in either part of her remark, provided she left me in peace.

"I am sorry you are indisposed," said Mr. Norris, kindly. "I will send my housekeeper to take care of you; she is particularly successful in cases of illness." Then addressing Lady Elmore, he added, offering his arm, "And we will return to the drawing-room. I shall be thankful for any exertion in my favour to-day, or my guests may find it weary work accepting a bachelor's invitation."

So saying, he carried off Lady Elmore, and presently returned with an active, motherly sort of person, whom he called Mrs. Pringle, and recommending me to her care, rejoined his friends.

"Dear heart!" exclaimed the old lady, bustling about and rearranging the cushions. "Do you always enjoy delicate health, or is this an event?"

"It is only a passing indisposition, the result of great fatigue, I believe," was my answer, which sent her out of the room, promising to bring something which would quickly restore me. She soon reappeared with a glass of some highly-spiced specific, urging me to try its efficacy,

which I was willing enough to do, the aroma being very inviting.

"It is a pity to come out for pleasure and be ill; but there, the world is always going topsy-turvey. Some say there are people the other side of the earth whose feet would touch ours if we made a hole deep enough—*antipipa-deeds*. I think they call them; but that I can't believe. Why, you know, they must walk on their heads for that to be true. Mr. Cruse, our butler, says he has seen both a man and a woman walk on their heads, and he calls them some sort of *bats;* but I am older than he, and never heard of any bats but those which fly. Now, my dear lady, you look better; you won't be *disenabled* long. Let me offer you some of these biscuits, they are plain and simple."

Lionel, faithful to his charge, here entered, informing me that the company were now repairing to the shell of the old abbey, where the breakfast was spread, and inquired if I were well enough to join them.

"Better not, better not," said Mrs. Pringle; "though, to be sure, it is a great miss for the lady—such delicacies and sweetmeats too. Why, I told master I could not do more if it were a wedding-breakfast. There is a game-pie, made after a recipe which once came from Queen Elizabeth's kitchen; such a pie, sir, as kept my brains alive for three days, lest I should mistake the quantities of the condiments. Let me see——"

Doubtless Lionel preferred tasting to listening to the details of the composing items; for, assuring Mrs. Pringle that he was extremely anxious to taste what had cost her so much thought, he hastened away, engaging to come and escort me to the ruins after the repast, as soon as the company had a little dispersed, it being too great an ordeal for me to present myself in the middle of the feast.

Not having seen the grounds, the principal object of the excursion, our party outstayed the others on my account; and, sometimes with Lionel, sometimes with

Mr. Norris, I afterwards visited a few points of interest lying near.

It is weary work trying to be amused, searching the brain and memory for expressions to testify the gratification expected, when every nerve is sick and weary, and the only feeling of which one is conscious is a longing for the rest and quiet of home. With pleasure I heard Lady Elmore propose returning, but resolutely refused her offer of a seat in the carriage.

"You are not wise, Una, to wish to ride," she said, in her dry way. "I must really arm myself with your husband's authority, and insist upon your driving home; the groom will fetch your horse to-morrow;—with your permission," she added, in a softer voice, addressing Mr. Norris.

Believing myself equal to riding slowly back to the Beeches, under the care of Lionel, and not disposed to exchange the freedom of speech which I enjoyed with him and Agnes, for an hour and a half's close companionship with my starched mother-in-law, I reiterated my intention to ride.

"Herbert will be vexed if I suffer you to make yourself ill," replied Lady Elmore, an unfortunate reference, as it revived the scene of the morning and the recollection of my disappointment. The bitterness of the moment returned with such force as to throw me off my guard and scatter to the winds all proper considerations of the fitness of time and place, and I answered, with unmistakable irony, "He gives me very satisfactory proofs of the depth and reality of his solicitude,"—words no sooner spoken than regretted, the dead silence which followed sufficiently marking their unsuitability. Without carrying the bondage of propriety to the same extent as the Elmores, I was instantly aware that I had grossly violated its rules. If alone, Lady Elmore might have said something in condemnation of my intemperate answer; in the presence of Mr. Norris and the rest of the party, she acted as if she had not heard it. Turning

to Mr. Norris, she said, "May I ask you to order the carriage and three horses." A slight stress laid upon the numerals, as she spoke, was the only notice she condescended to take of my reply.

Vexed and mortified, I bit my lip and looked another way, trying to bear myself as bravely as I could. In a short time we started homewards, the carriage first, the equestrians afterwards. Mr. Norris mounted Agnes, leaving me to the care of Lionel, and, as I fancied, showed more coldness than courtesy when, in bidding "good-bye," he added a hope that I had not overestimated my powers.

A great humiliation was in store for me, proving the very littleness of folly. A few minutes sufficed to destroy my high-spirited resolution, and lay in the dust the pride which had counselled me so badly. After proceeding for about twenty minutes, the same feelings of faintness and fatigue I had experienced in riding to Holmewood again overpowered me, and I felt it to be almost impossible to go farther, yet I held on with unyielding determination till, the reins slipping from my hand, I felt myself swaying from side to side in the saddle.

Lionel was immediately beside me. "You are ill, Mrs. Elmore!"

"Yes," I answered, as soon as able to speak; "I cannot ride home. What am I to do? How foolish I have been. Let us go to the village, and see if a fly can be procured." The high road we were on led to the village, but the nearest way was through the park.

"Not to Holmewood," I said, as Lionel, leading my horse, was turning into the plantation. Too late, for Mr. Norris was at that moment coming through the gateway, and could not fail at a glance to understand everything. Being on foot, he urged Li nel to mount, promising to take charge of me.

To his cynical turn of mind, this result to my vehement assertion of independence would be a prolific subject for

amusement, however softly in appearance he might encase the shafts of his wit. Notwithstanding my intense mortification, I plainly saw that the best course was to take the initiative, so addressing Mr. Norris, I remarked, with the best face I could assume, "Pride must have a fall; see, I return a suppliant. Will you kindly allow one of your servants to get me a fly from the village?"

"Anything fit for Mrs. Elmore would be difficult to find nearer than five miles off; our little hamlet does not possess one."

What a mischance! I could only look at him in silent dismay, hoping that now he understood my wishes, he would think of some way of meeting them.

"First, let us return to the house, and see what Mrs. Pringle can devise in the way of restoratives. You look really ill," was his answer to my speechless appeal.

I felt so, and was also aware that vexation aggravated my indisposition. The drive with Lady Elmore, even had she taken advantage of the opportunity to descant upon my offences against her code, and upon my demerits in general, would have been far preferable to the conviction I now had of having been thoroughly in the wrong.

"What are they going to do with me?" I asked of Agnes, when, after again putting me under the care of Mrs. Pringle, Mr. Norris left us, calling Lionel away with him.

"I don't know," replied Agnes; "but it is evident that you must have some conveyance home, you cannot ride."

"I dislike horses, especially the high-*mottled* ones," said Mrs. Pringle—unconsciously substituting for mettled, a word more familiar in her calling—at the same time urging me to take a glass of some wonder-working cordial which she held in her hand. "One of my ladies was thrown from her horse and killed on the spot. Horses have never been *populous* with me since, though those they had at her funeral, poor dear! were very handsome. They tossed their heads about, and were as proud of their feathers as if they

growed them themselves. I always think, when I see creatures shaking their trappings, that fine feathers make fine birds, and that it is a powerful lesson upon pride and vanity."

At any other time, Mrs. Pringle would have afforded me much amusement, her defective education continually cropping up, and giving point to her natural good sense, but just now I was anxious. Not only was my homeward drive likely to be long, but Lionel and Agnes would necessarily complicate my misfortunes by being late for dinner. The former soon joined us, saying that waiting for a fly would involve so much delay, that Mr. Norris had proposed driving me in his phaeton, as soon as I felt sufficiently recovered.

"Unless," continued Mr. Norris, who had followed Lionel into the room, "unless you feel unequal to the exertion. In that case, I must request Miss Osborne to remain and bear you company."

To have been obliged to pass the night at Holmewood would have been the climax to the day's disasters, and an ever-suggestive text for Lady Elmore on the subject of my self-will and imprudence; yet I was secretly afraid that I might have to do so. Had it been Olivia instead of Agnes, I might not so easily have obtained my own way. As it was, my anxiety gave me spirit, and Agnes entered too sincerely into my feelings to offer any opposition, when I expressed my belief that, thanks to Mrs. Pringle's cordials, I was sufficiently recovered to make the attempt. It was therefore settled that I should accept Mr. Norris's offer, and that the others should start at once.

"See," said Mrs. Pringle, with some pride in her nursing, "Mrs. Elmore's cheeks have a colour in them, there is a little bloom coming over them; they were white as *marvel* when she came back, and now I declare they are blossoming quite pretty again."

"Just to prove that yours are indeed marvellous restoratives," said Mr. Norris, with a comic smile.

"No, they are not marvellous at all; they are made from herbs, mixed with brandy, with just a pinch of salt to draw out their power, and a little spice. I gather the herbs myself. When young, I had a taste for nursing, and studied *botaninny* and *natomy*. No; there is no marvel in my medicines. Master is always laughing at my recipes, but when he is ill, no one can do for him like Mrs. Pringle."

These words were more of a soliloquy than addressed to me; Mr. Norris had left the room, and Lionel was calling Agnes to mount and start.

In about half-an-hour, Mr. Norris asked if I really felt myself equal to the drive, and being answered in the affirmative, bade Mrs. Pringle prepare cushions and a footstool, and bring her best shawl to cover me.

It was past six o'clock; the heat of the day had cooled to a pleasant temperature, and the air seemed to revive me. Mr. Norris, not caustic, but kind and considerate, spoke a few words now and then on general subjects, justifying in every way my predilection in his favour.

"What a triumph I have given to Lady Elmore," observed I, after one of the frequent pauses in our conversation, feeling more unreserved with him than people usually were.

"It is always so with impulsive temperaments," he replied; "they must learn to accept the situation they create."

"I shall never get on with Lady Elmore," I rejoined; "she is so frigid, so stately, quite the opposite of myself in everything. I wonder what Lord Elmore saw in so cold a nature to attract him."

My companion turned his head slowly towards me, looking as if my remark surprised him; then spoke. "I should be inclined to reverse your idea, and wonder what she saw in him to please her, did I not believe that there is a fate in marriage, which can only be avoided by preserving celibacy."

"Lord Elmore's mind partakes now of his bodily infirmities," I began, obstinately adhering to my own opinion;

"but in disposition, I am sure he is superior to his wife. He has more feeling."

"For himself," added Mr. Norris, dryly. I could not help looking astonished. He continued: "I remember Lady Elmore more than twenty years ago—a handsome, grave, solitary woman, living at the Beeches with her only child, a wicked little fellow of five, always in mischief."

"My Herbert, I suppose, as he is an only son," observed I, laughing.

"Your Herbert," answered Mr. Norris, "then generally left to himself, for his mother at that time paid little attention to him, being too much absorbed in her own cares."

"Where was Lord Elmore?" I asked.

"Anywhere except at home. He had his own amusements, his own pleasures, quite independent of his wife and child. Owing to a scene I recall very well, my first impression of Lady Elmore was something like your own. I was about fifteen, and being at home for the holidays, went with my mother to call on her. Whilst we were paying the visit, it was suddenly announced that Master Herbert had stolen away from his nurse, gone to the water, unmoored a small boat from the bank, and, getting in, had drifted into the middle of the little lake, where he was shouting, clapping his hands, and rejoicing to be, as he thought, out of reach. His mother's quiet demeanour on that occasion, striking my boyish mind as unnatural and unfeeling, created in me a prejudice against her. There are two ways of being unnatural, one when the disposition and tastes are so smooth and narrow that regard for ourselves covers them all, and also when feeling has been so bruised and crushed by suffering that scarcely a spark smoulders among the ashes. Lord and Lady Elmore may find their counterparts in that description. All the esteem I have to give is for the latter. This is her day of power, and considering the numerous provocations she has had, it does not appear to me that she makes a very bad use of it."

"She makes her husband feel his dependence," I replied, with some asperity. Notwithstanding Mr. Norris' defence of the lady, my heart went out towards Lord Elmore, whom it pained me to see so often repressed and snubbed.

"Do you know any woman who can be safely trusted with power?" he asked, rather too seriously, I thought, for a joke.

"Well, I would rather Herbert resembled his father than his mother," I said, hastily.

Mr. Norris gave me a quick glance, and as quickly turned away his head. Hasty as it was, it awakened the idea that he pitied my infatuation.

"The best of him he owes to his cousin," he remarked, after a minute's silence. "He could hardly have lived ten years under the same roof with Lady Emily without benefiting in some measure by her influence."

"Who is this Lady Emily?" I inquired. "Herbert regretted so much that I should not meet her at the Beeches this year."

"Lady Emily is his only cousin, the daughter of Lady Elmore's sister."

"Is she a paragon?" I asked, mischievously.

"Not in your sense of the word."

"Is she handsome?" was my next question, feeling something more than ordinary curiosity in a person supposed to have exercised a beneficial influence over my husband.

"Handsome is a term I should never think of applying to Lady Emily Courland."

"What is she, then? Who is she like?" I asked, rather impatiently.

"Who is she like?" he repeated; "like no one else. What is she?—a lovely, lovable woman, with all the pleasing attributes of womanhood."

"The sex in general is much obliged for your good opinion, and in the name of all I beg to offer a protest. It

would, indeed, be hard, if only one in the world were deserving of commendation."

Mr. Norris laughed, saying something about the exception always understood with reference to present company—a compliment I emphatically rejected as phraseology far too trite and commonplace to proceed from him. The merry banter was pursued on my side for a time with as much spirit as my languor permitted, and then both of us relapsed into silence, each having, as it seemed, found food for thought and reflection.

Mr. Norris had roused my curiosity, unwittingly enough, for the conversation came naturally and appeared so harmless; nay more, all unconsciously he had been sowing dragon's teeth, destined to produce a harvest of those evil passions which the ancients ignorantly imputed to such fatal seed. They had not read what may well disturb the equanimity of the self-complacent—"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" and were therefore willing to seek in fable the explanation of the hurtful natural products of the human breast.

Dismissing Lady Emily from my mind for the moment, I began to speculate upon the kind of tale Lady Elmore would narrate, and the reception awaiting me. The general quiet as we approached the house showed that we were late and that dinner had commenced. The groom, who was watching for our arrival, came forward, and as we reached the hall door, by a sharp pull at the bell, brought the butler from the dining-room, followed immediately by my husband. Lifting me from the cushions by which I was supported, Herbert thanked Mr. Norris for his care with that peculiar sweetness of tone and manner which I always thought so engaging, though it did not appear to be estimated in the same way by my companion.

"Now, Norris," continued Herbert, "go into the dining-room—dinner is not far advanced;" then addressing me he added, "What is to be done with you, Una?"

"Take me to my room," was my answer, clinging to his arm for the stay I required.

On reaching my room he placed me on the sofa, and sitting down beside me, remarked, "I am sorry you have been ill, and were obliged to give Mr. Norris so much trouble."

"I could not help it," said I.

"You could not help being ill," he replied, with sufficient emphasis to indicate some knowledge of what had transpired, though his calm demeanour showed that I was then reaping the benefit of his fixed resolution, not to take up the differences which might arise between his mother and myself.

Meeting with no censure, nor any reference to the scene of the morning, I laid my head on his shoulder. To my great contentment he drew me closer to him and kissed me, saying, "Poor Una!"

For a bodily indisposition he had sympathy—none for the sicknesses of one's own creation, those finer sensibilities of the mind or heart, which, when hurt or out of order, are so much harder to bear. I should have remembered that in after days, and not have despised the smaller gifts because I had not all which my one-sided judgment claimed as a right. It is easy to be wise in the retrospect, but the difficulty is to find wisdom for the present hour. This might not be so great, would we but listen to the soft voice within, rather than to the louder tones of passion or self-assertion—to the whispers in the inner chamber which penetrate no ear but our own, and not to the noisy exponents of unreflecting impulse.

"What is the matter, Una?" asked Herbert in some surprise. He had a great horror of tears, and one had just fallen on my black habit.

"I am so happy!" I answered, casting both my arms round his neck, an assertion which, under the circumstances evidently puzzled him, for he replied—

"You are a strange being. Mr. Norris would say there is no fathoming the caprices of woman."

No; Herbert did not understand my nature or disposition, but he was well pleased to hear that I was happy, and added a second caress, asking at the same time what I wished to do, and if he should ring for my maid.

Remembering that he had left his dinner to attend to me, I begged him to return to the dining-room, saying I would take some tea in my room. "Come again, Herbert," I said, as he was leaving the room, "and come alone."

He assented with a smile, and kept his word, doubtless fully aware what visitor I particularly wished to be excluded. When he returned I was undressed, resting on the sofa, and the tea had just been brought.

To many wives my present intense happiness will be unintelligible. Happily for them, it is nothing new to see the partner of their life beside the couch of weariness, proffering those little services doubly acceptable from the hand they love; to me it was altogether a novelty. That evening long remained a green spot in my memory, one over which no shadow whatsoever cast its darkening gloom.

After an hour Herbert left me, saying that he should sleep in his dressing-room that I might not be disturbed, bidding me try and get a good night, in the hope of being well enough to drive to Henley with the others on the morrow, and witness the Regatta.

CHAPTER VI.

THE PICTURE GALLERY.

AS might have been expected, I was not equal to the exertion of going to the Regatta with the others, who, after an earlier luncheon than usual, went to Henley, leaving me at home with Lord Elmore. Whether Mr. Norris' remarks of the previous evening influenced me or not, I cannot say; but I felt less interest in contributing to my father-in-law's amusement, and fancied he was selfishly oblivious of the fatigue I experienced in reading to him so long. After a while he fell into a doze, when, leaving him to enjoy his nap till his servant should come at the accustomed hour to take him out, I glided noiselessly out of the room, and thought I would take this opportunity of going through some of the rooms I had not seen; for as yet, although I had been more than a month at the Beeches, I knew very little of the house of which I might one day expect to be mistress.

Crossing the hall to ring for the housekeeper, I accidentally met her. Mrs. Fowler was an elderly ordinary woman, not a character like Mrs. Pringle, merely resembling her in so far that she had been in the family nearly thirty years—an occurrence sufficiently rare in these days of change and independence, when masters and servants have, for the most part, lost the mutual attachment formerly so characteristic of an English household, the root of which divergence from the good old paths may be found in the restlessness pervading all ranks. The leaves of the forest, set in motion by an invisible breath felt

only by themselves, serve by their rustling to predict the coming storm. Let us hope that the unsatisfied cravings, which seem now to shake society to its foundations, are not the precursors of that social tempest which, perhaps at no distant day, will be permitted to destroy the associations of years, proving many of the best-calculated expectations to have been erected only on the ever-shifting sand.

There was, I knew, a large picture-gallery, containing portraits of the Elmore family, which I had not seen, the door being kept locked by Lady Elmore's order, and the room only entered now and then by the housekeeper, in order to open the windows and let in the air. Seeing her now with a bunch of keys in her hand, and concluding this to be her errand to-day, I asked her to allow me to see the gallery, which she willingly did.

Throwing open some of the windows and partially-closed shutters, to give light and take away the close, dusty smell, a long treble line of portraits, some dating far back, judging from their style of dress, came clearly into view. There were portraits with the flowing hair of the time of Charles the First, others with the mailed breasts or leathern doublets of Cromwell, and some with the large periwigs, long coats, and lace ruffles of Charles the Second. There were female portraits also, though these were in the minority; young and pretty, middle-aged and stately, and others past all pretension. Some, like not a few of the present day, were scantily clothed though elaborately adorned—both artist and dressmaker equally forgetting that a few more folds of lace would greatly enhance beauty, by adding to it the best of settings and the greatest ornament of all—modesty.

Mrs. Fowler, in show-woman's fashion, rapidly mentioned the names of the portraits as we walked round the room, many of which, never having heard them before, did not attract my attention, until having made the tour, I came to the

end adjoining the side from whence the examination had commenced. There hung Lord Elmore and his son, the latter portrait having been taken when Herbert was about twelve years old. Lady Elmore was not there, but beyond Herbert was one vacant space and only one.

"Why is not Lady Elmore here?" I asked, with some surprise at the circumstance.

"My lady had her portrait removed into her bedroom a long, long time ago, and Master Herbert's placed here in its stead," answered Mrs. Fowler.

"Why is the gallery always closed?" was my next question, thinking that I should only be too pleased to exhibit such a line of ancestors, whether my own or my husband's, already anticipating with no little complacency taking my place among the grim company by the side of Herbert, and settling in my own mind that we ought to be taken at once, while we were still young and at our best.

"It is a fancy of my lady's—I can give no other reason," replied Mrs. Fowler.

Hardly heeding her answer for the interest of the thoughts that occupied me, I suddenly perceived that the only place which remained unoccupied belonged to Lady Elmore.

At the very same moment, a mocking eye met mine, sharp and searching, appearing to laugh my secret ambition to scorn. Turn as I would, that face with its sinister expression attracted me. I could not help looking at it, painful as was the fascination.

"Who is that?" I inquired, pointing to the portrait of a man about forty, dressed in a black velvet doublet, unrelieved by any white or colour whatsoever. Mrs. Fowler had previously named him in her monotonous catalogue, without the sound reaching my ear.

"That is Master Wenham, so called, a learned man, I believe, but I don't know much about him. He changed sides in the Civil Wars, was first for the King and after-

wards went over to the Roundheads;—a spy I think I have heard say. One day I remember hearing Mr. Herbert propose to our lady having him taken away; but she said he was an ancestor and had better remain, not being perhaps worse than some of the others. She laughed a strange, uncomfortable laugh, not at all as if she were pleased. She used to do so formerly very much, but not now. She is more serious. Not that I ever recollect her looking happy, not even when she first came to the Beeches."

That Lady Elmore was unhappy in her married life I knew, and dimly suspected the cause—the old story of neglect endured and a rival preferred. More I might perhaps have easily learnt from Mrs. Fowler, had I not shrunk from obtaining knowledge from such a source. In this instance my propriety was greater than my curiosity.

"I will leave you now," said Mrs. Fowler; "you may like to examine the pictures by yourself."

"Thank you, I am satisfied," answered I, prepared to leave the room with her, feeling almost childishly timid at the idea of staying alone, under the surveillance of a physiognomy so displeasing as that of Master Wenham. I was unconscious of being superstitious, yet something seemed all at once, under the withering sneer of that eye, to weigh me down, telling me I should have no place amidst the Elmore family. To obviate such a contingency, I determined that Herbert and I should sit for our portraits the first opportunity, though without any intention of exposing my weakness by telling him my reasons for desiring it. I wished to cheat Master Wenham and prove him a false prophet; but, not being courageous enough to encounter my husband's ridicule by revealing the secret motives which influenced me, I altogether failed in persuading him to be taken, and my wishes on this point were never accomplished. Master Wenham remained master of the field.

"Just see my lady's picture, now you are here," said Mrs. Fowler, opening the door of Lady Elmore's room as we were passing.

I walked in. The room was large, handsome, and lofty, with nothing to distinguish it except an air of dismal propriety, which seemed the characteristic of everything belonging to her. Two pictures hung side by side, very different yet somewhat similar. Lady Elmore's was taken some five-and-twenty years ago, and represented a handsome, thoughtful woman, too grave to be generally attractive, yet bearing some likeness to Herbert.

It was a misfortune that I could not attach myself to my mother-in-law—could not make a real effort to break down the barrier which her cold manner and natural reserve continually raised. Even at that period of my life, when acute sorrow usually awakens kindness and gentle thoughts towards those who, we know, have suffered like ourselves, I found no pity in my heart for her. In contrary ways we both bore the penalty of our own faults —I for the effect of self-will and unrestrained evil passions, and she, because unable to bring her proud, unbending spirit to forgive an offence against herself. I have known others besides Lady Elmore, who passed through life with feelings thus early embittered, the fresh spring poisoned at the fountain-head, allowing the acrid stream to flow on without endeavouring to sweeten it—forgetting the condemnation they daily called upon themselves as night and morning they bent the knee, uttering the petition—"Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us."

From Lady Elmore's picture I turned to the one beside it, representing a lady not very young but very beautiful—a soft, lovable face which took you captive at first sight.

"My lady's sister, Lady Haddan, now Lady, or Mrs. Barrett, for she has married again," said Mrs. Fowler, following the direction of my eye. "During her widow-

hood, she and her daughter lived here the greatest part of their time. They left us about three years ago. We were all sorry to lose them, especially Lady Emily, her daughter. She was like an angel in the house, so good, no wonder her mamma can't spare her. Poor lady! they do say she is not happily married. Master Herbert was always fond of his cousin. When he was a boy, he would often give up his own pleasure for hers."

Here was I again on the track of Lady Emily, this paragon of excellence, as I was beginning mentally to designate her, notwithstanding Mr. Norris' decided repudiation of the term.

"Who is Lady Emily like?" I asked, hoping from this source, the garrulity of which is proverbial, to obtain some information, and too eager to feed my curiosity to feel any scruples about the means employed.

"Well, my lady—I beg your pardon, I mean ma'am, though you will be my lady some day, for the matter of that—she is like no one I know. We always say she looks and talks like an angel. I heard Mr. Herbert call her a saint one day when vexed with her; but he is very fond of her for all that, and I think would have married her if they would have let him."

"Why would they not let him?" I asked, too interested to feel ashamed of what I was doing—surreptitiously extracting gossip from a servant.

"Well, you see, ma'am, that could not be. The Elmores are poor and extravagant, and Lady Emily has no fortune at all."

"Did she love her cousin?" was my next question.

"Very much, I think; for she often cried when he did anything he ought not, and especially when he and his father disagreed. She had great power over him, and kept him regularly to his church whenever he spent a Sunday at the Beeches."

This last illustration of Lady Emily's influence did not

create jealousy. Regularity of attendance at church I did not consider an important duty. I would at that time have preferred spending the day in the society of my husband. At the Beeches, every one went once to church, because it was right and proper so to do. I fear none of us then esteemed it a privilege or regarded the opportunity as an advantage. We did not, as every real Christian must, echo the language of the Psalmist—"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord."

Looking longer at the portrait, certain wavering lines about the mouth appeared to indicate weakness of character, causing me to ask if Lady Emily resembled her mother.

"Very much and not at all," answered my companion. "You might say there was another spirit put into the same body. Lady Emily is not so pretty, but far more pleasing;" and Mrs. Fowler would have run on much longer in her praise, had I not turned away. Shall I own that I was tired of Lady Emily, and had no willing ear for the list of virtues on which the housekeeper was inclined to expatiate.

Thanking her for her attendance, I retired to my room, intending to meditate upon the information gained, the principal and most distasteful part of which lay in the remark—"The Elmores are poor and extravagant." Another voice heard in my father's study, but unheeded at the time, came unbidden to my memory, linking itself with this, though happily without then assuming any important personal signification. I was too happy in the recollection of the regret expressed by Herbert that morning at my inability to be present at the Regatta, to be forward to fasten a quarrel upon him.

My peace of mind, however, was not destined to last long undisturbed. The following morning at breakfast it received its first real shock, when Herbert, in distributing the letters, laid two down before himself; one he read, the

other, unmistakably in a feminine hand, he put into his pocket unopened. A similar circumstance occurred soon after our marriage. Two letters arrived together in handwriting resembling each other; one from his mother he read to me, the other he put away, as he had done now, without making any allusion to it. This reminiscence, in connection with the present incident, disturbed me; I could not remain quiet; some explanation I felt was due to me. To demand it, I went immediately after breakfast to my husband's room.

Not finding him there, I sat down to await his return. Idly casting my eye round the room, it fell on a large table, where lay writing materials, papers, a pair of gloves, and, close to these, the letter Herbert had read that morning. The thought occurred that perchance the other was there also. Without any definite idea of what I meant to do, without reflecting on the nature of the act, I approached the table, took up the papers, and began turning them over, wondering if I should find the object of my curiosity among them.

While thus employed, a heavy hand was suddenly laid on mine, and a voice so stern as to be almost unrecognisable asked—"What are you doing here? You have no permission to touch my papers, scarcely to enter the room. What are you looking for?"

"A letter," I answered, blushing, beginning to feel very uncomfortable.

"What letter? No letters of yours are brought here; they cannot be mixed with mine." Herbert's eye, almost colourless in its sternness, was fixed on me. I nearly sank under it.

"Forgive me, Herbert," I said, clasping his arm, the only part I could reach where I was standing; "forgive me, I am quite ashamed of myself—indeed, I did not consider what I was doing."

He stood still and unbending—this I am thankful to say, he did not shake me off.

"You are most probably ashamed to be caught," he answered, in the same displeased tone. "What letter are you looking for? None of your own, it is evident."

"I am really ashamed," I replied again, and as he had turned a little, I hid my face upon his breast.

Quickly putting me away, he placed me in a chair, and repeated his question from a distance, "What letter were you looking for?—one that came this morning?"

Touching the open letter, he looked at me. I should have been so thankful had he accepted my silence for an answer and let the matter drop, even with a reprimand, which I would then have taken meekly enough, so humiliated did I feel by my thoughtless conduct. Though unable to tell a direct falsehood, my sense of the value of truth was not sufficiently strong to rouse me above the wish to profit by a misconception.

I had a half purpose to get up and quit the room, leaving him to form the conclusion suggested, and perhaps should have done so, had he not taken the offending letter from his pocket, saying, "Is this what you came for?" and without giving me time to reply, added severely, "Now mark what I say, Una: till I ask to see your letters, I beg you will not trouble yourself about mine. I will have no interference in matters that do not concern you."

"Most people think that what concerns the husband, concerns the wife also. Why am I to be on a different footing from other wives? I have an equal claim to consideration."

He bit his lip and looked vexed, then answered, curtly, "I think all wives that are not naturally sensible, have to learn to become so. It would be better for you not to come into this room at all. You were never invited."

"But your friends visit you here."

"My bachelor friends, and they are discreet. I can be sure that none of them will attempt to pry into any papers that may be lying about."

"O Herbert!" I exclaimed, meekly, for a temper like mine; "I told you I was ashamed of myself, you are very hard! Yet I do not think that I should have read the letter, had I found it. I only wanted to know from whom it came."

"And to discover that you must have looked at the signature, and in looking at the signature you would have seen a phrase or two exciting curiosity, and then——"

"No, no," I protested; "I came to ask you about it."

"And I found you with a heap of papers and letters in your hand," he replied.

I could make no way with him. For the first time I thought him positively unkind. He had inherited something of his mother's unforgiving disposition, though as yet I had not recognised it. Not quick to take offence, but once offended very difficult to appease, he had just the temperament least suited to one so impulsive as mine.

Notwithstanding his avowed aversion to tears, I did not care to restrain mine at this instance of hardness. They were very bitter as, after slowly gathering, they rolled down my cheeks—bitter then, not from penitence but from a more selfish sorrow. I longed to throw my arms round his neck and weep on his shoulder, but I felt that this, the natural privilege of a newly-married wife, would not be accorded to me—that, so far from consoling, he would most probably make me more miserable by withdrawing from my embrace. It was a misfortune that Herbert and I were so differently constituted; it was our fault that neither made sufficient allowance for the idiosyncrasies of the other. We were too young, and had been self-indulgent too long to have much chance of acquiring that mutual forbearance so necessary in marriage life.

Not attempting to check my tears at first, the very strength of my pain soon brought them to sobs.

"I dislike scenes, Una; you had better go away before you lose your self control. Crying will not mend the

matter. There, give me a promise never to come prying among my papers again, and let this affair be forgotten." So saying, he bent down and calmly kissed my forehead.

Such a dismissal did not satisfy the cravings of my heart, nor infuse into it any drop of that sweetness which is affection's greatest charm; still he had yielded a little. Before he could withdraw from my reach, my arms were round his neck, and several passionate kisses given, as I murmured, "I love you so dearly, Herbert. Do not think that I would willingly offend you."

"Then be good and reasonable," he said, in a softer tone, touched by my unwonted gentleness and humility.

"I should be very unhappy, and break my heart, if you loved another better than me," looking anxiously into his face as I spoke, without relaxing my grasp.

Probably a shadow of that unhappiness was already on my own, for as if not caring to meet that earnest gaze, he closed my eyes with a caress, then drawing a chair near and encircling me with one arm, he permitted my head to rest upon his shoulder.

"Una," he said, very gravely after a short pause, "this once I will tell you what you came to know, but at the same time must give you a warning. Take notice in time. I shall have no patience, no affection—I fear, no kindness—for a jealous wife. You would not only make us both ridiculous in the eyes of the world, but would destroy our home. I should detest it, keep away from it, and prefer any society to yours. All men naturally shrink from what is painful and disagreeable. I am no exception, on the contrary, perhaps rather more of a sybarite than many. Never enact this scene again. If you do, you will be sorry for it. Now, don't cry and make a fuss. I only wish to warn you betimes. If you are not happy, it must be your own fault. I never oppose your wishes if I can help it, and allow you all the freedom you can properly desire. Be as considerate towards me as I am towards

you: then we shall do very well together, and shall most likely be as happy as other married couples—happier than many, I dare say," he concluded, with a laugh.

This was all very reasonable, but it was only reasonable. I saw too well that the utterances of the heart had no place in his idea of home-life, and that there must be on my side a continual restraint of my expressions of affection.

As I did not answer, he resumed. "This time I will gratify your curiosity, but never expect me to do so again. The letter in question is from my cousin Emily, the only lady with whom I correspond. We have written to each other occasionally ever since we were children, and shall probably continue to do so as long as we live. I do not show you the contents; first, because I do not choose to impose upon myself such a fetter, and next—if I had not that cause to prevent me—I could not do so to-day, as the letter contains matter connected with herself with which you can have nothing to do."

"She is very fond of you, is she not?" I inquired.

A slight blush came into his cheek, and he hesitated an instant, then replied, "Yes, at least I hope so."

"And you are attached to her?"

"Extremely: as I ought to be to one whose influence has always acted upon me for good. Had I not been deprived of it for the last three years, it is my opinion that your husband would have been a better man than he now is."

"A wife's influence ought to be paramount," was my foolish observation, my irrepressible jealousy bursting into a flame, yet no sooner revealed than regretted.

Herbert spared me in words, though the expression of his countenance was very humiliating to me.

"When you know Lady Emily, you will be a better judge of your respective powers," was the answer, guarded enough to the ear, though I could not but feel there was a comparison not to my advantage.

Prudent at last, I asked no more questions, and unsatis-

factory as the reconciliation was, Herbert evidently considered it sufficient. Taking out his watch, he reminded me that he had an engagement at Henley that morning, adding that it was time for him to be off.

"Now, Una," he said, with his usual sweet smile, opening the door for me, "I do not absolutely banish you from this room, because with your over-sensitiveness you might deem that unkind, but I do not invite you to enter. It is a pity that our dispositions and views of things in general are so dissimilar, but I suppose we cannot help our natures. When I am what you call cold and unsympathetic, leave me here alone; and, one thing more," he added, with a light laugh, "never come to me with a grievance."

Thus dismissed I went away, persuaded that I was hardly dealt by; feeling this very dismissal a grievance in itself which I was inclined to weep over, instead of bringing sense and reason to my aid. Unacquainted with the highest principle of action, which, if it does not remove difficulties, smoothes their roughness and teaches us how to meet them, I had nothing to help me—no judicious friend to speak a word of counsel, no one to whom I could unburden my mind of its fears and misgivings. In my married life I had not found, what my character so imperatively required, a hand to lead me gently through its trials, and a heart on which I could securely lean. A chill I could not shake off crept into me, nor did it to-day yield as usual before Herbert's sunny smiles, when, returning early in the afternoon, he proposed accompanying me in a short ride, Lady Elmore having strenuously opposed my going again with Lionel and the Misses Osborne without him.

CHAPTER VII.

CURIOSITY.

IT was now nearly the end of August, and our visit to the Beeches was drawing to a close; at least I hoped so, and privately urged Herbert to fix the day for our departure. Lionel and the Misses Osborne had left. Mrs. Stanley still remained, and other guests arrived who had little interest for me.

My curiosity respecting Lady Emily I did not suffer to rest, though unable to obtain much information about her. Neither Lionel nor the Misses Osborne knew her; the latter were at school when she resided at the Beeches, and the former did not then visit in the neighbourhood. Mrs. Stanley, to whom I applied, merely said she was a good young woman, and Lady Elmore I did not choose to question. If I would not mortify my curiosity, there was but one alternative—to ask Mr. Norris. Being a frequent guest, the opportunity was not long wanting. One evening after dinner, strolling about the walks near the house in the twilight, a little apart from the others, I put my still unsatisfied question—"What kind of person is Lady Emily Courland?"

"Why do you ask me?" he replied, warily, suspecting me of some motive in attacking him. "Why do you not ask Elmore?"

"Because I want to know, and no one will tell me. Herbert never likes to be catechised about anything. Is she a woman to be jealous of?" I asked, after some hesitation.

There was a pause so long that I thought he did not intend

to reply, and was perhaps giving my words more weight than they deserved, so I hastened to soften the impression by saying gaily, "I am speaking conventionally, as men and women lightly talk."

"As men and women lightly talk, to quote your own words, many might be jealous of her," he answered, "but in serious earnest I must hope, no one. Do we envy the sun when we feel its warmth? Are we not grateful for its gladdening ray, and the good it effects wherever it falls? Do we envy or admire the gem that sparkles in the diadem?"

"You are eloquent and poetic," I said, laughing at this high-flown style, so unusual with him. "Perhaps we do some of us envy the jewels we cannot possess."

"Envy the possessor," said Mr. Norris; "that may be, but we do not envy the brightness of the diamond."

"Drop metaphor, and tell me in pure prose what Lady Emily is like. These high flights are beyond me. Please remember that I was born without wings. You said she was not handsome."

"No; there are many handsome women far less attractive. She has the sweetest face you can desire to look upon, and her character is sweeter than her countenance."

"In fact, a perfect woman, a paragon, as I had the pleasure of observing the other day."

"Just one to be jealous of, conventionally speaking, talking lightly, as men and women do," he remarked—repeating my words sarcastically, at least the tone sounded so to my ear—"nothing more. It would be base to envy goodness instead of imitating it."

"What sort of goodness has she?" I persisted. "Is she religious?"

"Truly so."

"But you are not a religious man, Mr. Norris," exclaimed I, in unfeigned astonishment at that characteristic being a ground of admiration with him.

"Thank you for your candour, Mrs. Elmore," he replied.

"It may be an advantage to hear how one is estimated by the world. You at least have done your part, it will be my own fault if I do not profit by it."

"But, Mr. Norris, I did not say that as a reproach," I observed, quickly, fearing I had displeased him, and quite unconscious at the moment of the conclusion my excuse involved.

"You will not tell me that you meant it as commendation, I suppose," he replied, drily.

I was on the horns of a dilemma, the usual fate of those who ventured to tilt with Mr. Norris. He was my best friend at the Beeches; I could not afford to offend him, so holding out my hand, I said, "Mr. Norris, whatever I may say or do, you must never be my enemy."

"Why?"

"Because you are so clever and so severe; so quick to see the worst side, and often so unmerciful to the offender."

"Really you have strong claims upon my gratitude, Mrs. Elmore. I must again repeat my thanks for the frankness with which you state your opinion. You have a quality valuable for its rarity, if not for anything else," he replied.

The evening shadows were falling, and the dark prevented my reading his countenance, so that I could not tell if I had been unfortunate enough to offend him. Further remark was stopped by a summons to the drawing-room.

"Mr. Norris—Mrs. Elmore—will you not have some tea?" asked a young lady from the window, as we passed; "or are you too deep in conversation?"

"We were not conversing, only talking," answered Mr. Norris; "ladies usually prefer the latter."

As we now entered the drawing-room, the subject was not renewed, nor had I another opportunity of asking about Lady Emily.

A few dinner-parties were given in the neighbourhood in my honour, but during the greater part of the time we spent

at the Beeches, Lady Elmore entertained, and the house was always filled with visitors.

One day I shall never forget. The weather was warm, so warm that no one cared even to drive or make any exertion. *Dolce far niente* was the pervading feeling. Some repaired to the lake to fish; others, idly reclining under the overshadowing elms, watched the operations of their more enterprising friends. I read a little to Lord Elmore, so drowsily as to send him to sleep; then, book in hand, sauntered to a retired nook on the lawn, where, concealed by a group of shrubs, I occupied myself with reading or lazily musing, until disturbed by the sound of unknown voices. "Elmore is sure to be at home at dinner-time," was the first thing I overheard, and without much interest; Herbert had so many friends from Oxford or London, who dropped in upon him, prepared to dine and sleep. I had been more or less than woman to have remained equally indifferent to the next remark: "What sort of a person is his wife? What an inconvenient fellow to go and marry just now!" They were walking up and down the path running behind the shrubs, and were out of hearing before the answer came. Soon turning back they passed again, and these words fell distinctly on my ear, "She is a pretty craft, certainly, and obeys easily when well-handled."

The hot blood mounted to my cheeks; was that the way that Herbert permitted his friends to speak of me? In my anger I was almost inclined to rise and confront them, stating who I was. Happily for my self-respect, the opportunity was lost while I hesitated. "There is Elmore; how well he is looking!" said one of them, and crossing the lawn to meet him, they all walked afterwards in another direction, giving me the opportunity of seeing Herbert's two friends. One was tall and very gentlemanlike; the other short and rather thick-set, having somewhat of the appearance of a sailor.

Waiting until they were out of sight, I reached my room

unperceived, and there remained, nursing my wrath till dressing-time, prepared to give my husband the full benefit of the displeasure which his friends had aroused.

"What now, Una?" exclaimed Herbert, on entering his dressing-room, whither I had repaired, surprised to find me there, and anticipating, I believe, another grievance, in spite of his prohibitions.

"I wish to ask who are those individuals with whom I saw you walking just now?" I said, with as much contempt as I could manage to throw into both voice and manner.

"Individuals!" he repeated, with a frown; "that is unbecoming language to apply to your husband's friends."

"And what if the husband's friends apply unbecoming language to the wife?" I retorted, with indignant irony. "My husband is perhaps so good-natured as to see no offence in that."

"What can you mean?" said Herbert, opening his eyes with astonishment. "It is a moral impossibility that either Captain Kingstone or Sir John Tredegar could have spoken a word calculated to offend you."

"You of course will see nothing offensive in the remark, because it is now your pleasure to put them in the right and your wife in the wrong; but I consider it insulting to be so slightingly spoken of—called 'a pretty craft,' and in a tone so disrespectful."

"What did you say?" asked Herbert, the frown vanishing and his eyes beginning to twinkle with ill-suppressed mirth, which only increased the indignation with which I repeated the exact words I had overheard. A peal of laughter followed my revelation, and tended to heighten my displeasure, as, each time he looked at my vexed countenance, his own was lighted up into merriment and a fresh burst of laughter overpowered him.

"Go and dress, Una, and don't be so foolish," he said at last. "You will certainly be late for dinner."

Taking off his coat, he began to brush his hair before the

glass, laughing again and again each time he looked towards me.

"I see nothing to laugh at," I said, crossly piqued at having my communication treated so cavalierly.

"Perhaps not, my pretty craft," he answered; "but you will when you know how premature you have been in appropriating even that modicum of admiration to yourself. They were not speaking of you at all, but of a friend's yacht now to be sold, which they wish me to purchase."

I do not know that I was better pleased to have the laugh so palpably against me by discovering that I had wasted my anger and made myself ridiculous without cause.

Of the prudence or the inexpediency of the acquisition proposed to one of Herbert's expensive habits, I was not a judge, nor did I give the subject a thought. Money hitherto had always been forthcoming for all our desires; it was not therefore probable that my thoughts should turn in the direction of expenditure.

At the second reminder that I should be late for dinner, I went away, quite forgetting to ask him to keep my folly to himself. When I thought of it, it was too late, he had already gone downstairs. That he shared the joke with his friends was evident, from the half shy, half amused glances exchanged as he introduced me, but I heard no more of it. The subject seemed studiously avoided at dinner.

One good thing I owed to the visit—a more speedy departure from the Beeches. Herbert proposed accompanying his friends the following day in order to see the yacht, then lying off Cowes, promising to secure an apartment in the hotel, and return for me in a few days. What fate I imagined would be mine if I remained without him is difficult to say, but I was obstinate in my determination not to be left behind. Go with him I would. Servants, boxes—all might follow as convenient, but I would accompany him wherever he went. Finding all arguments fail, and every attempt to persuade me useless, Herbert, though greatly annoyed, was

obliged to give way, the disagreement ending in a compromise. I was to quit the Beeches with him the day after the morrow, and remain in town while he went with his companions to Cowes.

Something of the joy attendant on leaving school, when its monotonous routine is exchanged for the freedom of holiday-time, characterised my feelings as we drove away from the Beeches. So delighted was I to escape from the controlling presence of Lady Elmore, that the dulness of home at that time of the year when London was empty, which under other circumstances would have been scarcely endurable, was more than welcome. My father was at Ryde, and the servants with him; only the housekeeper, her nephew, and a housemaid, left to take care of the house, were at home. With my maid, Herbert's man, and my own footman, we brought up the numbers a little higher. None of our friends were in town; that I did not mind. I had had enough of society while at the Beeches. Besides, in a few days I should see my beloved father.

The first day Herbert and I dined alone, a thoroughly social dinner, without the presence of servants, and very much I enjoyed it, after the etiquette always observed at Lady Elmore's table. Afterwards we strolled out; I took Herbert's arm. I can only hope, but do not dare to believe, that Herbert was as happy as myself.

The next day he went to Cowes, and I, thinking of Julie, drove to Conduit Street, intending to bring her home with me to spend the day. She was not there, having gone on a visit to my father and sister at Ryde. She was expected home in a couple of days. On the third morning I sent to inquire if she had arrived. No; she was expected that very afternoon. Another day alone, but I was not dull. That morning's post had brought me a letter from Herbert, the first I had ever received from him. It was very short, written in high spirits, all commendatory of the yacht, and began with "Dearest Una," phraseology so uncommon from

him that I surveyed the words as those of some cabalistic spell, exercising a potent charm over my happiness. That letter I have now, worn, it is true, with time, and the writing in some parts almost effaced with tears, but still a precious relic, never to be parted with until this heart of mine, with all its past errors and all its emotions, shall enjoy that everlasting rest which nothing can disturb.

It appeared that Julie and Herbert were leaving Ryde on the same day, and, as I afterwards found, travelled together.

"She is so silent, and when she does speak so dismal in her views of everything, I wonder at your father liking her so much," was Herbert's remark when pressed for his opinion of her, after their almost *tête-à-tête* journey.

I was a little cured of asking what people thought of him, and inquired only about my father and sister when I visited Julie on the following day. They were out when Herbert had called.

"I wonder what Herbert will think of Ellen when he sees her; is she very countrified?" I asked, as Julie and I were taking luncheon together, having brought her home with me for a few hours.

"As she is not his wife, and will not be obliged to live with him, it is of very little consequence what Mr. Elmore thinks of her. Were I you, I should never ask the question," replied Julie. "It strikes me that she leads a very happy life. I suppose she deserves it. Some people are born good, and others go astray as soon as they are born."

"And speak lies," I hastily added, finishing the quotation merely because the words came into my head. Her beautiful colour left her cheek, and her forehead became suddenly suffused with a crimson hue. In nothing was she like other people, even her blush must take an unusual course. Why her forehead now became crimson was a mystery.

"Did you enjoy your visit?" was my next question.

"The sea air did me good," she replied, evasively.

"Now, Julie," I began sharply, "I am out of all patience with you. As if it were wrong to be happy! I detest your theology! Good things, I am sure, were never given us with the intention that we should refuse to enjoy them. Not for anything would I adopt your opinions. Whatever happiness approaches me, I shall welcome it; gather the best fruit off every tree, and, when I am thirsty, drink, if my lips can reach the beverage," I said, laughing, taking up a glass of wine.

She tried to smile, but did not succeed; her lips only parted and remained open a few seconds. Doubtless she pitied my frivolity, though she did not permit herself to put the feeling into language. Nevertheless I thought her a little softened; there seemed a touch of sadness about her and less rigidity, nor did she make my careless remarks the text for a sermon or monologue.

My conscience was a little disturbed as I took her home before dinner, and left her to a solitary meal, instead of keeping her with me—a piece of selfishness for which I was duly punished, when, on reaching Upper Grosvenor Street, I found a line from Herbert, telling me not to wait dinner, as he was detained hunting up one of the sailors formerly connected with the yacht, whom he wanted to engage, and that he should dine at his club.

It was to enjoy another of those pleasant *tête-à-tête* dinners with my husband that I had condemned Julie to her solitary meal, and I was the more vexed and ashamed as I could not but know that I only sought her for my own convenience, and never with the idea of adding a single pleasure to her lonely life. It was vain to offer my conscience a convenient sop by suggesting that she preferred self-denial to enjoyment; I knew perfectly well that her wishes were never considered. From childhood I had, without scruple, availed myself of her abnegation of personal feeling, and never thought it incumbent on me to make any return. One so clever and astute as Julie must of necessity have noticed the selfishness of my

conduct; it was, therefore, the more wonderful that she bore it as a thing of course, without hesitation or remonstrance. Had she been more cheerful I should have liked her better; as it was, she depressed me more than I acknowledged. The young instinctively turn from what is dispiriting, not so much because unwilling to ease the burden of another, if they knew how to set about it, but in obedience to that law of their nature which leads them to revel in sunshine, and avoid the dark and gloomy. Had Julie been communicative, no doubt she would have drawn me towards her; even a slight knowledge of a friend's inner life is sure to beget interest, if not affection; but those who, enveloping themselves in a mantle of reserve, seem determined that none shall raise or draw it aside, must inevitably be left in the isolation they have chosen. The very pity they awaken cannot be fully expressed, nor can it fall with refreshing influence on the embittered spirit, sweetly and softly, as dew upon the earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DÉJEUNER.

OUR residence at Cowes was productive of more pleasure to Herbert than to me. The yacht was his passion, and, like many amusements, completely one-sided in the enjoyment it afforded. Unhappily I did not like the sea, and after making a few efforts to overcome my natural distaste, and persuade myself into thinking it better to be in Herbert's society than away from him, notwithstanding the varied phases of discomfort I each time underwent, I gave up the attempt, and reluctantly remained at home, or spent the day at Ryde with my father and Ellen. Herbert had not bought the yacht, only hired it for the season, with the option of purchase at some future time.

My father said little on the subject, but generally looked grave when it was mentioned, and on one occasion when Herbert was eloquently descanting on the qualities of his pet, he pulled him up rather abruptly, saying, "Watch the money, Master Herbert; you have chosen an expensive toy."

"Aye, aye," was my husband's rejoinder, making the professional salute, and looking very handsome in the sailor's dress, which he now almost constantly wore.

My father said no more, nor did he ever decidedly condemn Herbert's passion for the sea, not even when I carried him complaints of the loneliness to which the indulgence of this taste had consigned me. For a time I bore my daily disappointment pretty well. My father's house was within an easy drive, and his carriage generally fetched me

early each morning, and brought me home in time for our late dinner.

By degrees the attractions of the *Ariel* became stronger and stronger, resulting in a longer cruise and a more protracted absence. Two or three days at a time, sometimes longer, once a whole week, Herbert remained away, always accompanied by one or more of his friends, of whom he seemed to have an inexhaustible variety. Pouting and expostulation were equally vain ; I lost rather than gained each time I employed these ugly weapons, and had occasionally to undergo a punishment which wives, resent as they may, often find themselves powerless to avert. The yachting club close by was always available, and there Herbert not only dined himself but entertained his friends, whenever my ill-humour gave little prospect of a pleasant time at home.

One day, towards the end of September, an hour before my usual dinnêr-time, Herbert, after an absence of two days, unexpectedly entered the room, accompanied by a gentleman, in whom I recognised Sir John Tredegar. He was of the same height as Herbert, and not unlike him when seen from a distance. The colour of the hair and eyes was the same, and both had a similar graceful carelessness of deportment.

It would have been fractious indeed to have given a cool reception on this occasion, even had not the presence of an almost stranger been a kind of protection against a display of domestic discord. Sir John was very gentlemanlike, and knew how to be very agreeable. I therefore gave orders for a better dinner than the one intended for myself, and more willingly than I usually did when taken by surprise. My toilet I made with care and attention, for the first time thinking more of what was becoming than what would best please my husband.

The dinner passed off very well. Herbert was gay and animated, our guest chatty and agreeable. Once or twice

glances were exchanged when the *Ariel* was mentioned. that of Herbert appeared to imply a caution; but altogether the repast was cheerful, and the evening passed not unpleasantly.

"Una, come here, and look at the sea," called Herbert to me the following morning from the balcony, as I was sitting down to breakfast. "See how smooth it is, not a wave, scarcely a ripple," he continued, as I stood beside him. "Don't you think you could go with me as far as your father's? The wind is in the right quarter, we are there in half-an-hour. We can land almost close to the house."

True, the sea was still: quiet and harmless as a sleeping enemy lay the bright waters in the sunbeams; the air, sweet, buoyant, and exhilarating.

So unusual was it for him to ask my company in the *Ariel*, my confirmed dislike for the sea being fully understood, that I looked in surprise for an explanation.

"I want your help," said Herbert.

My help! how glad I was to be something to him—to undertake anything which would draw our lives out of their divergent paths, and bring them into the same channel. "What can I do?"

"I want you to help me to persuade your father to lunch on board the *Ariel* to-morrow. I have half promised the invitation to your sister, besides it is a courtesy due to Mr. Pinnoch before he leaves us. We have been rather remiss towards him, owing to my frequent absence."

I was much gratified that Herbert wished to show this attention to my brother-in-law, who, in his homeliness and rough speech, was so unlike himself. I said I was willing to go, merely remarking that if one day did not suit my father, another might, as the Pinnochs were not leaving for a fortnight.

"I want you to arrange with them for to-morrow positively," said Herbert, while a shade of meaning I did not understand passed over his countenance.

The little voyage was made without discomfort. I could not but admire Herbert, he looked so happy and so manly as he trod the deck of his little kingdom, while we coasted peacefully to our destination. The horizon was so blue, the waters so green and almost limpid, the very wavelets kissed the keel with a murmur of gladness as we glided on. I might have understood the charm such scenes must have where the taste for seafaring is strongly developed; but we are so apt to let everything revolve round the pivot of our own tastes and feelings, and judge accordingly.

Our object was achieved, they all promised to be present at the luncheon, so, leaving me to drive home with Ellen later in the day, Herbert returned in the yacht to order and arrange all the needful preparations.

"All is settled, and every order given for to-morrow. The steward will have everything ready," said Herbert, throwing himself down in an easy-chair with a languid air as soon as he entered the room, only a few minutes after I reached our hotel. "How wearisome exertion is on land. I wish you liked the sea, Una," he added.

"Or that you liked it less," answered I. "Since we are wishing improbabilities we may as well take it in turns."

His unnatural gravity attracted my attention, casting a shadow over the pleasure anticipated on the morrow. Every occasion of drawing my father into society I hailed with delight. I had also begun to appreciate the extreme sweetness of my sister's character, though it had not yet occurred to me that it was possible for me to acquire her disposition.

"Something is the matter, Herbert," said I, watching him with uneasiness, his manner and countenance being restless and disturbed. Except when annoyed by my complaints and remonstrances, his face was ever pleasant to look upon, because bright and sunny, not restless and uncertain like my own, but constant and unvarying. The life he desired resembled the calm waters of the placid stream, flowing for ever in a smooth course, and giving a smiling aspect to the

scenes through which it passed; nothing deeper, nothing better appeared necessary for him. It was my misfortune that I had not the practical sense to bring my love to the level he required. Mine was a true but not a great love. It was too full of myself, too imperative of an equal return, certainly not entitled to the blessedness of those who are more willing to give than to receive; being very far from possessing the character described by the poet as—

> "With constant watching wise,
> A heart at leisure from itself to soothe and sympathise."

In vain Ellen often counselled me to put aside my high-flown imaginings, and accept a more prosaic position as the only wise and prudent course in my power to pursue. Unhappily I was more disposed to be swayed by my passions and prejudices than my interests. I could not—perhaps it is truer to say I would not—follow her advice. What could she know of my trials and difficulties? I mentally asked, her life was so smooth and so bright. The love of husband and children filled her days and heart; how could she judge of the emptiness of mine, and that constant yearning after something which ever eluded my grasp. Was not the best part of my nature shut up, excluded, not wanted in that daily intercourse which my husband called life. How could I be gay, and meet him with unvarying smiles when I felt myself, my wishes, my feelings, so habitually slighted. Thus I argued with myself, and thus I endeavoured to stifle any doubts about my conduct which Ellen's different views occasionally created; so fertile is our poor humanity in excuses for its shortcomings, and so ingenious in extracting them from sources which ought to furnish arguments of a totally different nature.

Herbert did not leave me long in doubt as to the cause of his disquietude; perhaps he was relieved at my leading to the subject. "It was desirable to fix to-morrow for the luncheon," said he. "Mr. Pinnoch will like to come. He takes some interest in sea affairs; besides this may be the

only opportunity I shall have of entertaining him. I am going away for some weeks. He will probably have left Ryde before my return."

He spoke carelessly enough, yet I detected an uneasy glance at me when he had finished. He knew me too well to believe that I should take the announcement quietly.

"Some weeks!" I repeated, doubtful whether to appear angry or sorry, or, to speak honestly, uncertain to which emotion I should surrender myself, both being equally strong.

"Yes, it must be weeks; I and Tredegar are going on a cruise about the coast of Norway. When there we shall take the opportunity of seeing the country and some of the towns of Sweden. I cannot say exactly how long I shall remain away, probably until after your father's return to town."

I started up and went out upon the balcony; the hot blood first mounting to my brain and then curdling cold at my heart, according as the two agitating feelings prevailed. For six weeks at least he purposed roving about, leading a life of pleasure, leaving me to take care of myself, regarding me not as a thinking being to whom honour and consideration were due, but rather as an item of his possessions, which might at will be laid aside and left at home. The effort to control my mixed feelings was at first painful. My lips trembled and my heart beat violently, but I remained silent.

"I thought you would like to stay with your father; room can easily be found for you. It will be pleasant to pass a little time with your sister and her family," continued Herbert, rising and approaching the window; "you will like that better than remaining here, will you not? You shall do as you please; if more agreeable to be independent, stay where you are, and invite a friend to visit you."

When the main point is carried, it is not difficult to be kind in little things, though not easy to invest them with

sufficient importance to please. Invite a friend! Whom could I ask whose society would compensate for the loss of his?

"I shall go to my father," I coolly answered.

"That is better in every way," he replied; "it will please him to have you, and also be a stroke of economy, for which he will be slow to give us credit."

He looked in a measure relieved, yet not altogether happy. Had the subject rested there, concern for me and my evident pain might have sobered his joyous anticipations and widened my place in his thoughts. Unfortunately, as is the case with most women, feeling predominating over prudence, I evinced some of the bitterness of spirit I was enduring.

"Who are your companions?" I asked.

"Only Tredegar—Captain Kingstone cannot go."

"He has, perhaps, too much consideration for his wife to leave her so long merely for his own amusement," I rejoined.

Without noticing the reproof implied, he said, "By-the-bye, the Kingstones are in the Pier Hotel at Ryde. I have asked them to join our luncheon-party to-morrow."

"Of course, you are sure to invite those least agreeable to me," was my answer, tying and untying my bonnet-strings, by way of doing something to take off the edge of the irritation I was suffering.

"Not so, Una; I thought that Captain Kingstone, having travelled a good deal, and possessing information on many subjects, would get on well with Mr. Pinnoch."

"Who is not good enough for more aristocratic guests," I said, with a sneer.

Herbert here recovered himself. The uneasiness he had at first shown—proceeding, I believe, from regret at causing me so much visible pain by his intended pleasure-trip—entirely disappeared, and he answered with asperity think you try to be provoking, and wilfully take a wrong

view of everything I do. I thought you liked Mrs. Kingstone, you appeared friendly enough together the other day."

"On the contrary, I dislike her—she is a bold, gossiping woman, always putting people right, and flaunting her imagined superiority before the eyes of others," I said, with vehemence. She vexed me by continually boasting of her power and influence over the Captain.

"Well, it is done and cannot be altered," said Herbert, shrugging his shoulders; "I did it for the best."

"As far as yourself was concerned—your usual rule of action. I ought to be accustomed to that by this time, only I am such a dunce; four months' experience has not perfected me in the lesson. My intellect moves very slowly," I said, with a poor attempt to counterfeit a laugh.

How hollow, how miserable it sounded to my ears! To his I fear it had a more expressive signification. Snatching up his hat, which he had thrown on the table close by, he merely said, "Do not wait for me, I shall dine at the club," and was gone before I clearly understood the meaning of the words.

That horrid club!—my bane, and his haven of refuge from the strifes and unpleasantnesses of home, always at hand to defraud me of the just privilege of grumbling, and to prevent my inflicting on him his proper share of the vexation he caused me! Fierce was my tirade against the club at the time, nor was my anger much softened throughout the evening, which my intemperate language compelled me to spend alone.

"A word is sometimes worth a pound," says one proverb; "Silence is golden," says another, and both are equally true. To many, the latter is the most difficult to practise. Speech is such a natural weapon of defence, as well as a source of enjoyment, difficult in both cases to use moderately. The inspired writer of proverbs has put honour on the effort to restrain it, declaring that the war-

rior's chaplet, with the brave deeds it is intended to celebrate, must fade into insignificance before the glory of him who "ruleth his own spirit." Would that the lesson were more universally learnt!

When the luncheon-hour arrived, the first person who came on board was Sir John Tredegar, whom I did not expect, and whose presence restored my good-humour, the most carping disposition not being able to tax the entertainment with the absence of the aristocratic element. On the contrary, my anxieties took another course, and I wondered how Mr. Pinnoch would appear by contrast with two such men as Sir John and Herbert. My father did not come, but with many excuses to cover his own absence, sent his grandson as his substitute, with Mr. Pinnoch and Ellen.

Johnnie, a precocious boy of eight, just come from school, naturally buoyant and noisy, thought it a grand thing to lunch on board a yacht, and a capital joke to be the representative of his grandfather. The Kingstones arrived after some little delay, and then, the party being complete, we sat down to the *déjeûner*.

The absence of my father, whom he really liked, was an especial disappointment to Herbert, making him less tolerant than usual of the loud and ready laughter of Mr. Pinnoch. The latter, good and sensible, but not refined—not at least in his external manner, where Herbert was so sensitive—frequently jarred his susceptibilities, chiefly by the habit he had contracted of accompanying his own observations with a laugh—a practice we sometimes see in those naturally nervous temperaments, not early trained to acquire the self-possession of what is termed good society. With Captain Kingstone he was more at ease, his sailor bluntness suited him better than the fastidiousness of his brother-in-law, and to-day did us all good service. The two talked and joked and were merry enough, neither offended the other, while the wives also got on pretty well together. Ellen, ever sweet and gentle, if she did not suffer herself to be

imposed on by the assumed superiority of Mrs. Kingstone, was patient under the infliction, perhaps also secretly amused by the manners of the masculine lady. Another source of discomfort had opened for Herbert, which, I must own, afforded me concealed enjoyment, and that was the predilection Johnnie had taken for him, and the pranks in which he indulged. He 'uncled' him every moment, gave his opinion unasked, and kept up a running fire of questions, wanting to know the why and the wherefore of all he heard or saw. He was a child of the new pattern—the old sort being almost extinct. In these days of progress, when the wheels and springs moving us along the high road of life are screwed up to make the social machinery go faster and faster, scarcely allowing time to put on the break of reflection, childhood has not been left behind. Very few of the little beings are childlike. The onward impulse has been given, and they are hurrying forwards. Nothing is too hard for them to attack, nothing too sacred for them to handle.

Veneration and the modest reticence which distinguished the learned and gifted Lady Jane Grey and similar characters, is altogether a thing of the past. That she never sat down in the presence of her parents without permission, would be, in the estimation of the young of the present day, a theme for mockery, if not an unintelligible fable. Children of the period know very little of wholesome restraint; they will dispute with father or mother over the suitableness or propriety of a command, instead of obeying it, testing its reasonableness by the faintest glimmer of intellect, and thereby adding their part to the hastening on of that disintegration of society which can have but one result—the destruction of the general good.

Johnnie was no exception; his parents, sensible in most things, had failed here, and by their too visible admiration of the supposed talents of their eldest-born, prepared him to become intensely disagreeable to others. He was an

irrepressible child, always challenging attention, no sooner put down on one side than up and alert on the other. Before luncheon was half over, he had left the table unreproved, and was running and leaping about the yacht. Suddenly we heard a loud popping and fizzing; his taste for experiments was developing itself by meddling with the corks of the champagne. Thus warned as to the sort of behaviour to be expected from his nephew, Herbert called one of his most trusted men, and consigned the lad to his care, bidding him, in an under tone, see that he got into no mischief. Ere long he was again at his uncle's side, his hands black with tar, energetically demanding permission to do something which his temporary guardian had prohibited.

"Now, uncle, dear uncle, do take me for a cruise with you," said the volatile child, hearing something about the expedition, and forgetting, in the excitement of the new idea, to urge the request he had come to make. "Papa, may I go? Oh, Uncle Herbert, do, do take me with you!" and by way of adding force to his petition, he threw the grimy hands round his uncle's neck, giving him at the same time a most unwelcome hug.

Neither Sir John nor I could repress a smile, the nepotine affection was so distasteful to the recipient. Daintily taking the child by the wrists, so as not to soil his own aristocratic fingers, Herbert put him away, and then settled his disordered collar and necktie, with a manner not particularly flattering to parents who considered their offspring a model of intelligence and activity.

Of all the party, I believe Herbert experienced the least gratification, and was the most glad when the *déjeûner* was over. The utmost politeness at his command consisted in a low bow, when my sister, on taking leave, hoped that her boy had not been troublesome—a formality which some parents adopt who would be indeed startled to receive an answer in the affirmative. To Sir John and me he was

afterwards more explicit, and declared that such an ill-bred cub should never sit at his table again.

Poor Johnnie! it was hard measure to punish him for faults which really were not his own, and it would have been a punishment had he known it. He had conceived an affection and admiration for Herbert, which grew up with him, though he never had the good fortune to overcome the prejudice caused by the meddling and forward ways of his childhood. He and Herbert never made friends.

CHAPTER IX.

BEREAVEMENT.

HOW could you be so cold, Una!" exclaimed Ellen, as Herbert left the room, she having been present at the parting when I had so belied my feelings as merely tender to the forehead to receive his farewell.

"It is of no consequence to him," I answered, with angry humour.

"But much to you," replied she, quickly. "I know it partakes a little of the nature of weakness, if not of folly, but I can never divest myself of some painful presentiment when people part in displeasure. It is, of course, superstitious, yet I should always be haunted with the fear of not meeting again."

"Don't say that, Ellen," I interrupted, bursting into tears. "Please do not put into my head an idea so dreadful. Were such a fear realised, I could not live."

"Impulsive sister!" said Ellen, with a kindly smile, sitting down by me, and laying her hand gently on my hair. "We will forget my fancies, if you like, and only try to bear in mind that both for you and for me our trials, when they come, have been nicely weighed, and are all proportioned to our strength."

"I cannot talk so; I cannot even glance at a separation which would be unendurable; I am sufficiently unhappy already."

"Yes," said Ellen, with imperturbable calmness, as if reflecting for her own benefit, "it must be great unhappiness to be angry with those we love; as if, striking with a

double-edged dagger, you wound two sides at once, the feelings and the passions." Then addressing me, she added, emphatically, "O Una! if you would but try and think differently, your life might be so much happier. Here is a little book I have lately met with, headed, 'A man is what a woman makes him.' I have bought several for distribution at home. True, it is not written for persons in your sphere, but as principles do not vary, only their application, you might find some useful hints if you would read it."

"I can do nothing with Herbert, unless I yield in every particular; he is so selfish, and does not know what true affection means," said I, putting away the little book she had laid upon my lap: its instructions did not, in my opinion, concern me.

Ellen looked at me with a kind of tender pity, and then asked, pointedly, "How is true affection defined? We cannot do better than bring it to the same test as charity, which 'thinketh no evil, seeketh not her own, doth not behave itself unseemly, is not easily provoked, suffereth long and is kind.' When we sincerely purpose to cherish true love in ourselves, we shall have much indulgence for those who fail."

I could not be angry, though I felt the reproof intended. Conscience for the moment found a voice loud enough to be heard; besides, Ellen kissed me so fondly, when she had finished speaking, putting her arms round me with almost motherly affection, and making me feel grateful for the soothing support. I was undergoing one of those softening influences when the spirit is stirred for good.

"Think of these things, dearest," continued Ellen, "till they become a part of yourself. It is for that purpose we are told to ponder over what is 'lovely and of good report.' The mind thus occupied dips itself, as it were, in these beautiful dyes, and reflects them upon others; this is the influence one person may exercise over another. And do not waste your energies with useless fretting and grieving. But we have not quite finished with our quota-

tions. 'Charity hopeth all things.' Where we cannot embrace the full scope of the Apostle's magnificent definition, we may yet apply his teaching to minor circumstances, and take out of it some consolation for ourselves, only let us be sure that we are in the road where comfort is to be found."

I knew that Ellen and Mr. Pinnoch were what is termed religious people; I had also seen, during their visit at Ryde, that they lived very happily together; but I had not united these two facts, or thought that one might possibly grow out of the other. To my mind they were happily matched, and that was the limit of my comprehension. I could not help, however, saying rather enviously, "You are so fond of each other, so united in your tastes, and Mr. Pinnoch thinks so much of you."

"Not exactly united in our tastes," she replied, "but we endeavour to adapt ourselves to each other. Believe me, Una, dear, that is the secret of every happy marriage. Nature never formed two persons exactly alike. Mutual concessions must be the rule, and not a rigid determination to hold the balance even. Joshua is very good, but he is also strong and firm. Were my opposition frequent, it would irritate instead of obtaining consideration. Whilst willing to take up the cross appointed us, we must beware of regarding our faults, and what springs from them, in that light. I am well aware that in weighing our own actions, it is hard to be faithful with ourselves. Human judgment being erring at the best and often one-sided, we must be prepared to find the verdict each one passes on himself somewhat partial."

"Not all; Julie is an exception. What do you think of her?" asked I.

"Think of Julie Kenyon!" repeated Ellen; "why, I think that her mind is diseased. Something has been wrong in her life, over which she has brooded until no longer capable of forming a sane judgment upon it."

"Her notions of religion are shocking; I would rather be without any than have hers," said I, vehemently.

"Softly, softly, Una," rejoined Ellen, mildly; "that is too much to say. Erroneous and obscure indeed as are her views on some most important religious questions, I do not think she is wholly wrong. From some unhappy obstruction, proceeding from defective vision, or, it may be, the pride of heart that understands suffering better than pardon, true light has not as yet reached her mind. From some cause or other, many, from whom we must not withhold the name of Christian, have never enjoyed what the Apostle calls 'the glorious light of the Gospel,' but have gone mourning all their days, carrying to the end a burden they might have laid down. Let us hope that with Julie the dark cloud may pass away. No, no, Una; Julie's state of mind is not sound, but I think her sincere. On a precipice, hidden in a mist, it is better to be awake than asleep."

"Have you no idea what her sorrow is?" I asked, not being disposed to prolong the serious part of the conversation.

"I *know* nothing," returned Ellen, with emphasis sufficient to show that she thought a good deal. "Till this summer, when she spent a short time here, I had not seen her for many years. On general subjects she would talk freely enough, but on personal matters was unapproachable. Poor Julie! I never liked her, not even as a child, still less when older, and always shrank from her caresses, which were never offered except in the presence of my parents. Her cold beauty displeased my girlish taste."

For the first time I became aware that my gentle sister experienced the same antipathy towards her as I had done.

"I had sometimes thought that her offence, whatever its nature, was against our mother, and your story confirms the notion," remarked Ellen, after listening to my account

of the scene witnessed when I called to announce my engagement and secure her companionship in a drive.

Conversation fell naturally upon Julie and her oddities. We made many surmises as to their cause, and finally worked out a case, which, being a patchwork from our own imagination, is not now worth recording.

The time I spent with Ellen passed, on the whole, not unhappily. Her affection and tender ways beguiled me into listening to good advice; and, perhaps, had we been longer together, my mind might have been imbued with the desire to seek the strength I so greatly needed. She was, however, anxious to return home, the sweet tie of maternity recalling her to the children she had left behind. Only Johnnie and his younger brothers—two fine boys of five and six—were with her at Ryde; the girls, of the ages of twelve and thirteen, being left at home with a governess.

Attendance on my father filled up the time pretty fairly after the Pinnochs departure. Intentionally or not, he certainly required more attention than formerly; his health was not so good, he walked less, and occupied himself with less facility than he used to do, appearing to receive impressions more slowly.

At first, the superstitious feeling Ellen aroused tormented me with the anticipation of shipwreck, illness, and all possible misfortunes; but when a letter came announcing Herbert's safe arrival in Norway, and also setting forth in glowing colours the good qualities of the *Ariel*, my mind became tranquillised.

In the beginning of November we went back to town, and in a few days my husband returned.

In April my little Percy was born The event took place at the Beeches, in compliance with Lady Elmore's request. For a time I had vigorously opposed my mother-in-law, but her wishes being supported both by my husband and father, I was ultimately obliged to give way.

A new phase of life now began for me. I was no longer

her son's wife, to be watched and schooled into the requisite stiffness and propriety, but the mother of the little heir, of whom Lady Elmore took nearly entire possession. Though receiving all the care and attention my health required, I certainly occupied a lower position than formerly. I was deposed; the claims of the grandchild altogether superseded mine; and to this decree of the autocrat of the Beeches I was compelled to bend. Percy, being a delicate, fragile child, awakened anxiety, and required skilful treatment. Young and ignorant, I had to depend on others. Justice compels me to admit that Lady Elmore's counsels were necessary as well as useful, yet I half resented the monopoly she wished to establish, even when availing myself of her superior knowledge.

In the summer Herbert resumed his yachting, and I and Percy remained with my father at Ryde, making his failing health an excuse for omitting my expected visit at the Beeches—a penance only deferred, as Lady Elmore insisted on our going at or after Christmas.

Of my home-life that winter I am unwilling to write; its felicity was far from complete, though for a time Ellen's lessons and eloquent example exercised a certain influence. Radically I was nothing wiser, nothing better. My old dissatisfied feelings returned with more force than before; nor were they improved by the strong parental love which Herbert from the first evinced towards his child. I was not only surprised, but sometimes driven into an agony of tears, at seeing how his whole soul responded to this new claim upon his affection. His first and last thought on entering or leaving the house was for Percy. To my jaundiced eye it seemed that he had no care, no solicitude, no love, but for him—and—and—— How can I record a thought so dreadful—a thought hereafter wept over with such untold bitterness, but which no tears could expunge from my memory. There were moments when I regretted the birth of one who absorbed so completely the affection

which ought to be mine, thrusting me, as it were, out of the heart where I desired so ardently to be cherished. I ought to have rejoiced over any circumstance calculated to rivet the domestic tie in a character so careless and pleasure-seeking as Herbert's. It was a good trait, had I been able to make use of it; but I was too much under the bondage of self to see things in their proper light. Though loathing the thought, I could not altogether eradicate it. I only succeeded in keeping the frightful secret within my own breast, shutting in the poisoned spring from whence my petulant and often irritating conduct proceeded. Surely I was not sane. Let us hope that on this point my mind had received some unnatural twist from which it was too sick to recover.

The time arrived for our visit to the Beeches.

"I want you and Percy, with the nurse, to go to-morrow without me. I wish particularly to remain in town a few days longer. I will join you very soon," said Herbert, the evening before we were to start.

A visit to the Beeches without him was not endurable.

"I will wait as long as you please, but without you I will not go," said I, with firm determination, feeling confident that he had no reason for the request but his own pleasure. "Either you go with me or I stay here till you are ready."

He argued in vain, and was obliged to yield, there being no time to apprise his mother of our altered intentions. My obstinacy gained but little, for our journey was performed in silence, each being much vexed with the other.

Arriving late, the only person visible before dinner was Lady Elmore; but on descending to the drawing-room, surprise mingled with uneasiness at finding there my old friend, Lady Mayfort. Some show of kindness was in her greeting, though later I had less reason to be pleased with the meeting. The whole evening she appeared to be scrutinising both my looks and behaviour, most likely also

considering the light in which I was regarded by the family. Herbert kept entirely aloof; Lady Elmore was occupied chiefly with her guests, leaving me no resource but the conversation of Lord Elmore, whom I found more and more cloudy. Pride, I fear, more than anything else, made me regret the unkind part I had acted against my husband's wishes. It would be especially mortifying to me for Lady Mayfort to perceive the estrangement between us. She would not congratulate me upon my engagement when first announced, and now I would not allow her to be in the right. Brief and broken as my happiness had been, I would not believe it was over, still less could I permit her to think so. My affection had the same passionate force as ever, though my way of testifying it was more original than commendable. It was my object to blind her, and for that purpose I needed some ingenuity.

Knowing that she and Herbert were conversing over the fire the next morning, I entered the room with Percy on my arm, and after offering the soft little face for her to kiss, I held him up to his father, believing that whatever cause of displeasure he had against me, it would vanish before this appeal. Nor was I wrong, for taking the tiny burden from my arms, he began talking freely with me about the little fellow's improvement, and after caressing and playing with him for some time, proposed taking him to the nursery, adding, "He is rather heavy for you to carry upstairs."

"Yours is almost poetic domesticity; I had no idea that Mr. Elmore could become such a domestic man," observed Lady Mayfort, as the door closed upon him. She spoke seriously, yet there was a something in her downcast eye which made me doubt whether my ruse had been altogether successful.

The few days we spent together did nothing towards reuniting the broken link in our friendship; it was effectually severed, once and for ever. My efforts to conciliate were

as feeble wavelets falling upon the rock-bound coast, no tangible result attended them. A few words gently spoken, cold and meaningless in their character, was all I obtained from her. With an aching heart I acknowledged the futility of further endeavours; my life had brought me in contact with none whom I could regard in the light of friends but herself. The fault might in a measure lie with me. Selfishly restricted in my sympathies, they went out to so few that when these failed I stood almost alone.

There comes a time when the trials some sensitive natures ingeniously make for themselves—or instead of gathering up their energies to meet, deepen by morbidness—yield to reality. So it was with me. A dark shadow even now had entered our house, and was noiselessly stealing along its walls. Death, as yet, I had never witnessed; I was now to behold the stern despot in his grimmest aspect. One morning my dearly-loved father was found dead in his chair by the bed-side. No warning for me, no other preparation for him, than what existed in his daily life. He had said "good-night," apparently in his usual health, when he retired to rest, just about the time that Herbert and I went out to an evening entertainment. Now, without a farewell, without a word from that tender love which had never failed me from childhood's earliest hour, he was taken away, and I could no more hear his voice or meet his kindly eye. It was a heavy stroke, for if I had not been the best of daughters, he had been the kindest of fathers. I loved him dearly, and he was satisfied.

Kind, indulgent parent! equally beyond the reach of my cry of anguish or the tear of penitence, that your happiness, rather than my own, had more occupied my thoughts and stimulated me to exertion! How bitterly I mourn your loss, none can tell but those who have undergone the trial of experiencing the withdrawal of the beloved and supporting staff on which they could always, and in all circumstances, securely lean.

CHAPTER X.

THE WILL.

JULIE will come early to-morrow, and remain with you."

These words were Mr. Pinnoch's, and the day referred to that which was to close the last resting-place over my beloved father.

"It is well for her to be here at the reading of the will, or you would be alone."

Joshua Pinnoch was still the speaker and our guest, without Ellen, who was unable to accompany him. By some peculiar reasoning of his own, he fancied I must be alone in the absence of female friends, though my husband and brother-in-law were both present. In conjunction with Herbert, he had been left executor, but from the first took the principal direction of my father's affairs. That he and Ellen were the elder children was an indisputable fact, and possibly they had certain rights which I did not clearly understand, as I felt some surprise at finding both Herbert and myself suddenly thrown into the background. Not that my brother-in-law was in any way forward or disagreeable, only decided and outspoken. He acted somewhat as an elder son, and made arrangements in a manner to make us believe him cognizant of the terms of the will.

Herbert kept aloof, to my astonishment appearing almost under the tutelage of Mr. Pinnoch, adopting his suggestions and obeying his directions with a docility and a deference to his opinion never hitherto evinced towards him. A certain restlessness, at variance with his usual self-contained

demeanour, was observable in him for some days previously. To this was added a deep red spot on one of his cheeks, and a varying expression in the eye, as he took his seat rather behind me when the time came for the reading of the will. Pecuniary anxiety had no place in my mind, nor did it appear to exist in that of Mr. Pinnoch, who was calm and serious, the same as ever, but for the subdued tone which, on occasions such as this, falls on all concerned, whether the result of feeling or awe. Deep as was my grief, natural intuition showed me the great difference beneath the surface in the other two.

Julie sat with every feature fixed in stony rigidity, like one doing a duty in which she took no interest, and from which there was no escape. Her bodily presence was given because Joshua Pinnoch requested it; her spirit was—that was a question often affording a greater puzzle than I had intellect to solve. It was gone somewhere, shut up in some cell of thought, which held it imprisoned and from which it could not be recalled by the claims of ordinary and material objects.

Herbert, outwardly calm, insomuch that he indulged in no fidgeting or handling what lay on the table, as is customary with many nervous people, was not quite quiet. The self-possession, almost taking the character of indifference so often remarked in the bearing of men of his stamp, was absent, replaced by a forced and altogether foreign demeanour. As Mr. Slater drew the document from a large under-pocket, and laying it down before him, deliberately put on his spectacles, Herbert shaded his face with his hand.

After one or two comfortable sniffs, and a preliminary "ahem" to clear the voice, the lawyer began his work.

We will not follow him throughout the tiresome reading, which occupied a good half-hour. The preamble of a will, with its intricate technicalities, is supremely uninteresting to all, especially to those who are anxiously waiting to be made

acquainted with its contents. Suffice it to give the principal points.

Contrary to the general order of things, my father's property had not been much exaggerated. In spite of our rather lavish expenditure, and his great generosity to some less fortunate than himself, he died a rich man.

To Ellen and Joshua, myself and Herbert, he left ten thousand a year; to me, his beloved Una, as I was styled, he bequeathed two thousand a year in addition, with immediate possession of one thousand pounds, to which property Mr. Pinnoch and Mr. Slater were appointed trustees, with a charge, on no consideration, to suffer it to be alienated from me or diminished. Ellen, having already received a considerable dowry on her marriage, was to have what brought her fortune to the same amount as mine, and a handsome legacy in addition for her children. To her, all was freely left; no trustees, no restrictions, no conditions; she and her husband were entirely unfettered.

A bequest of three hundred per annum was for Julie Kenyon, the long-tried and faithful friend of himself and his wife.

To Mrs. Watson, our housekeeper, who had been in the family from my childhood, he left sixty pounds a year for life.

The lease of the house in Upper Grosvenor Street, with all its handsome furniture, also that of the villa at Ryde, were left to Herbert and me.

Percy was not named, an omission easily explained, as the will was made before our marriage, and no codicil had been added. Whatever intentions my father might have had respecting him, they were not carried out.

Other bequests followed, some to friends, some to old clerks, and a few to hospitals. Ellen and I, coupled together in one loving remembrance, were named residuary legatees.

The reading concluded, Herbert rose and stood before

the window for some time in silence, and while Mr. Pinnoch and Mr. Slater were talking, slipped out of the room. He could not, I imagined, be dissatisfied with the general tenor of the will. Mr. Slater pronounced it to be a very good one, nor did any one challenge the opinion. In some respects Herbert stood on a different footing from Joshua Pinnoch in my father's estimation, but not, I think, in his affection. Their intercourse had always been pleasant, and a mutual liking existed, strengthened on my husband's side by avowed esteem.

"Mr. Elmore is young, a man of fashion and expensive in his habits. We thought to benefit you both by the terms on which your fortune is left," observed Mr. Slater to me, noticing, perhaps, that I cast an anxious glance at the door through which Herbert had just disappeared. "If I mistake not, he will live to be thankful for that clause, if he does not like it now," muttered Mr. Slater to my brother-in-law.

I was satisfied, well knowing that my beloved father could have but one desire—our happiness. Anxiety at the present moment sprung up on Herbert's account, as to the way in which he might take it.

Speculation on the subject was brought to a close by Julie. Rising from her seat, she made a few steps in advance towards the door, as if going away, then paused by a table near and pressed her hands against it. "Gentlemen," she began, in a clear, resolute voice, though her face looked disturbed. She was very pale, except the forehead, where a bright flush continued to deepen. "But where is Mr. Elmore?" cried she, stopping abruptly and looking round. "I wish to speak in the presence of all; where is Mr. Elmore?"

"Ah! where is Mr. Elmore?" repeated Mr. Pinnoch, glancing about him. He never approached the familiarity of dropping the Mr., though they were brothers-in-law. "Una, you had better call your husband," he continued,

"as it seems that Miss Kenyon has something to say which she wishes him to hear as well as ourselves."

In answer, I rang the bell, not willing to be the messenger, as, in the uncertainty I felt about the light in which he might regard the trusteeship appointed for me, I was unwilling to meet him.

The servant's instant appearance might have suggested a suspicion of unfair curiosity, evincing as it did more promptitude than is generally expected in answering such mechanical appeals, had we not been too much taken up with what was passing to be critical.

"Ask Mr. Elmore to be so good as to join us, his presence is required immediately," was all I had to say, and the man closed the door, which was shortly opened again by my husband entering in his accustomed easy way. All trace of previous disquietude had vanished. Glancing round inquiringly to discover the cause of the summons, I believe a sensation of pleasure was conveyed to his feelings at perceiving that Julie, and not his wife, had been the occasion of his return.

"Miss Kenyon has asked for you, wishing you to hear some communication she is about to make," observed Mr. Slater.

"Being one of the executors," explained Julie parenthetically, and thus continued—"In the presence of you all, I wish to express my deep gratitude to Mr. Randolph for his kind remembrance of me; yet, for reasons satisfactory to myself, but which I do not wish to submit to the consideration of others, I feel it right to decline his handsome gift. You will therefore, gentlemen, consider mine a lapsed legacy, and act accordingly."

So far she was strong, speaking in a voice that was steady enough, though the agitation which pervaded her whole frame as she finished, showed how much the effort had cost her. Making a slight inclination intended to comprehend the whole company, and gathering herself up for what

really then had the appearance of exertion, she left the room, followed by Mr. Pinnoch.

Herbert watched her retreat in silent and curious surprise, and then gazed fixedly out of the window. There was not much to see, as it fronted the least interesting part of the street; therefore I ventured to disturb his meditations, Mr. Slater having plunged into a close examination of the document before him.

"I had nothing to do with the making of the will," said I, going nearer to Herbert. I wished to ascertain what he really thought of it, and knew not how to break the subject.

"Did any one think you had?" he answered, without looking at me.

"No; but I fancied you might think that—I was afraid that——" stammered I, and then stopped short, feeling that I was talking nonsense, and that if he felt no annoyance, I was very foolish to suggest one.

Turning round quickly, he examined my blushing face for an instant before replying, speaking loud when he did so, and as if on purpose for Mr. Slater to hear. "Mr. Randolph has more than kept his word with me, he has acted very liberally."

The noise made by the rustling of Mr. Slater's parchment was here interrupted by the unmusical accents of Mr. Pinnoch, who opened the door, talking from the outside, as many do from thoughtlessness, and many others whose breeding has not taught them that such a proceeding may possibly unpleasantly disturb those conversing inside. In this instance his abrupt entrance was welcome. Mr. Slater, not considering himself addressed, was silent, and I had nothing to say.

"What an obstinate woman! she will hear neither sense nor reason," said Mr. Pinnoch, angrily. "I even told her that Mr. Randolph wished to put the annuity at five hundred, and was only induced to make it less in the hope that it might thus be more easy for her to

accept. He had some insight into the peculiarities of her character."

These words were addressed to Mr. Slater, who answered quietly, "She must have it. We both know Mr. Randolph's feelings on the subject."

"She is three parts of a mule and one of a vixen," said Mr. Pinnoch, crossly. "I wish you had seen her face when I told her that she had better take the annuity. and not make herself ridiculous."

"Did you also tell her that you and I persuaded Mr. Randolph to leave her three instead of five hundred a year?" asked Mr. Slater.

"I did; upon my word I actually mentioned it as a claim upon her approbation," he said, breaking into a laugh. "Not many could be expected to see the affair in that light."

I glanced at Herbert, who stood aloof, indifferent to Julie's case, whether she accepted or declined, in order to see if he remarked all that might be inferred from what was said. Joshua Pinnoch had been consulted on the testamentary question, might he not have suggested the clause so uncomplimentary to Herbert?

"She must take it," repeated Mr. Slater.

"Oh! she must take it," echoed Mr. Pinnoch. "If we cannot persuade her," he added, turning to Herbert, "Una must take her in hand. By representing the ungraciousness of her conduct, in so disregarding the wishes of a long-tried friend, she may produce some impression. Tell her, Una, how her refusal would distress your father, could he know of it, and, moreover, that it amounts to a reflection upon his judgment. Touch up her feelings a bit; she is a woman, after all, and must have a soft corner somewhere. Una must make it her business to discover it—what do you say, Mr. Elmore?"

"I leave the matter entirely in your hands. You seem better apprised of Mr. Randolph's wishes than I am."

Was this careless courtesy, not wishing to take a part in what the other would do so much better, or a designed reference to the interference in my father's affairs, which he had just acknowledged? I was not sure, the tone was so soft and his manner so gentlemanlike. So indeed it always was, yet if stung, might he not be likely to sting again?

"We expect great things from Mrs. Elmore, you perceive," said Mr. Slater, addressing me.

"Yes; she must make the proud lady give way, or we will know the reason why," said Mr. Pinnoch, decidedly, letting his tall, gaunt frame subside into a chair near me.

"She must be half a maniac," observed Herbert. "Whoever could suppose it would be necessary to beg and pray an individual of limited means like hers to accept a simple, moderate legacy from a friend of twenty or thirty years' standing, bequeathed, too, in terms sufficiently flattering. I should be inclined to let her alone, but you know best."

Both of the gentlemen were willing to adopt the first part of the opinion expressed, yet both were equally determined to overcome her present resolution.

About a fortnight later, I was on my way to Conduit Street to see Julie. Mr. Pinnoch, no longer our guest, was in London on business of his own. He sometimes dined with us, Herbert never failing in politeness to him, while I began to like him, and to discover some of the worth, so patent to my father, underlying that unpromising exterior, though I had not yet reached the conclusion that Ellen had made the better match.

It was not my custom to have myself announced when visiting Julie, but certain recollections putting me on my guard, I contrived in opening the door to make noise sufficient to give her notice of my approach.

She was, or rather had been, writing. Pen in hand, she was turning over the leaves of a large volume, most probably a diary, which I knew she kept under lock and key. Much of the hardness so painfully stamped upon her

countenance was gone, replaced by a kind of sadness, indicating not so much deep emotion as the absence of feeling —an apathetic state which left no room for either hope or grief. A gloomy cloud seemed to have settled down upon her, hopelessly darkening the evening of her life. It was not in humanity to refuse the tribute of pity at the sight of this desolate woman in her home, strong as she was, when, issuing from her solitude, she so boldly confronted the world and her duties in it. Alone, the scene was different. The rigid mould into which not only her features, but her words, actions, perhaps even her thoughts, were cast, told a tale of anguish repressed but not conquered. The human heart must love some one or some thing. Isolation, cutting it off from every tender sympathy, is not a lot that woman can bear without injury to her nature, nor will a rule of duty, however faithfully obeyed, compensate either to herself or others for the want of womanliness, though that should land her in a crowd of errors and mistakes. Some failings, proceeding from impulse, are endearing after all. We would rather not have it otherwise with many whom we love well, for if they do not display the greatest sense, the want is amply redeemed by the large expansive heart. Not so was it with Julie —the head was always there, line and plummet measured her sentiments when she mixed with others; what the inner life was, no one knew; only a few glimpses came in my way, and from them I shrank, as a child from a dark closet. Externally, her home was cheerful; the pretty room, in which she usually sat, was furnished with taste and elegance; several expensive pieces of furniture were there, showing a more lavish expenditure than could be expected from her situation. There was, however, an absence of the numerous knickknacks in which ladies like to indulge, less from frivolity than a love of the fanciful and varied beauty which these toys often display.

She received me without rising—that was customary—

pointed to a seat, and began some conventional inquiries about my health. Those answered, I was ready to plunge into the business on which I came, and began by handing her a letter that morning received from Ellen.

"Your sister is very good, so kindly to express her approbation of your father's bequest," she remarked, returning the letter. "Mr. Pinnoch ought to have made her understand that I do not accept it."

"Why not, Julie?" asked I, glad to be spared seeking a commencement. "You know that papa was in earnest—that he had a sincere regard for you; always solicitous about your comfort, while he was with us, it was only natural that he should think of some kindness which might act for you now he is no more."

I could not proceed for weeping. It is so hard to have to remind oneself that the loved one is really gone, leaving such a painful blank in the daily life. And yet we do learn to submit, even whilst shedding bitter tears; we even apparently return to our avocations as if they had been undisturbed. Changes and partings—some for a time, many for eternity—are always going on; this is Earth's unchanging law. Perhaps no sun sets in our horizon which has not witnessed the breaking of one human heart.

Julie, too, was not unmoved. I saw her raise her hand and dash it hastily over her eyes.

"You cannot refuse without showing unkindness, I may even say disrespect, to his memory," I urged. "The executors will not suffer you to decline."

The last observation destroyed the influence of the first; the softened shade passed away immediately. Turning her dark, sharp eye upon me, she replied, resolutely, "There is no influence in existence, neither friends nor executors—no power on earth strong enough to alter my resolution in this particular. Do not talk any more about it, Una. Thank Ellen for the kind feeling she expresses on the subject; it is good of her. It is also good of Mr. Pinnoch

to be angry with me; I do not misconstrue his motive. It is, I know, from a desire to see Mr. Randolph's wishes carried out, and also to lighten the lot of a solitary woman, by enabling her to have the power of procuring more creature comforts than she now enjoys. But I do not want them—they would not alleviate but increase the trials incident to my loneliness. I will not have them!" she added fiercely, after a moment's pause.

"O Julie! how can you be so unkind and so ungrateful!" exclaimed I, shocked at the sternness of her countenance, more expressive of injury than of benefit received.

"No, no! I am grateful, very grateful that he has gone to her—that he has been spared the knowledge—that he has never suspected——oh! had he known and looked upon me with the loathing that——"

Here the hard woman, hard no longer, if strong emotion be the measure of feeling, pressed one hand before her eyes, and rocked herself to and fro.

Surely what I then witnessed was remorse, some bitter memories too deeply stamped on the tablets of the mind to find either utterance or obliteration. But wherefore?—what had passed ere she entered on the statue life in which she usually lived, only occasionally roused out of it by some sudden gust of feeling which shook her whole being like the powerful blast of a tornado?

Wishing to console, but at a loss how to set about it, I took her unoccupied hand in mine. As I half anticipated, it was immediately withdrawn. She did not want sympathy, and repulsed my overtures. To proud natures it is sometimes more irritating than soothing.

"Had my father suspected you of such hard obstinacy, would he have esteemed you so much? He liked you next to his own children. What would he now think of your friendship for him?" I asked, adopting a different tone.

"'The faithful friend of my wife and myself,'" repeated

she, slowly, emphasising each word: "does not the bequest run so?"

"Something like it," I answered, not being able to recollect the exact phraseology, having been at the time too much occupied with Herbert to take any especial note of it. "He could not have chosen language more complimentary to you," I added.

"I tell you, Una," she answered, removing her hand from her brow, and fixing on me her large, tearless eyes, "nor you, nor the executors, not even your father's spirit, could it return on the errand, shall ever induce me to appropriate this annuity."

"Will you notice the date of this?" said I, handing her a small slip of paper, on which was traced in my father's handwriting, and found in his desk when I looked over the papers, "Mem. for will—my faithful friend, Julie."

As she read it, her lip quivered visibly, but soon mastering her emotion, she said calmly, "I will keep this, if you please. This is the only legacy in my power to accept," and she continued gazing as if spell-bound on the scrap of writing she held in her hand.

"You remember the day dated," said I. It was an eventful one to me, also that on which, coming to impart the news of my engagement, I found my father leaving the room, and Julie in that remarkable state of excitement.

"I do," she answered, and here her firmness gave way. Putting out her hands as if waving something off—a memory or a person, I could not tell which—she took her head between her hands, and interrupting the words with spasmodic sobs, wailed out, "Heaping coals of fire upon his head!"

I was greatly moved and greatly perplexed. Without wishing to pry into her secrets, I experienced a yearning to console the suffering creature, yet what could I say? In my ignorance I might do more harm than good. Nothing requires to be touched more gently than real sorrow, and

this was real indeed. Perhaps in her case, the hand of no human friendship was delicate enough to enter the sanctuary of the heart and drop a soothing balm. The skilful surgeon often makes a wound smart before attempting to heal it, but he holds no uncertain course. He knows the how much and the when, apportioning both the irritant and the salve in just proportions and at the right moment.

"Julie," said I, "what is this mystery in your life, which you shut up so closely in yourself, and that seems to tear your soul with anguish? Why are you so Spartan-like? Surely a kind word of sympathy from a friend would comfort you."

For the first time I was drawn towards her; griefs I had of my own, yet they seemed all unreal in comparison with hers, as the little rill compared with the flowing river.

"Who, knowing what I am, would give it me?—not you," she answered.

"Try me," I said, gently. "Life is not so very bright with me; I can better weep with those who weep, than rejoice with those who rejoice. Try me," I repeated. The evident suffering of the desolate woman moved me strangely; and this time she did not repulse my effort to take possession of her hand.

"There is no sympathy for me in heaven or on earth," she said, sadly. "The first could not give it, the second would not. If I could only expiate in any way!" She stopped abruptly, and withdrew her hand.

"What would you expiate?" I asked, really wishing to help her, yet not knowing how to accomplish it. Though disapproving of her theology, I had no better to offer. "Is there no forgiveness for wrong done?" inquired I, timidly, feeling just then a more personal than sympathetic interest in the question.

"No obliteration this side the grave," she replied, solemnly, making me feel thoroughly uncomfortable, and

exciting a dim vision of coming evil for faults and passions of frequent indulgence.

Her style of talking was disagreeable and depressing. I would not allow her to be right, nor could I point out where she was wrong, and resolutely dismissed the dismal forebodings she created. So severe in judging herself, how could she invite the confidence of others? She was consequently about the last person to whom I would have confessed. Most especially did I fear her discovering the jealousy I sometimes entertained of dear little Percy, feeling certain she would predict some dire disaster either to him or to me.

Poor Julie! she was groping in the darkness of an awakened but unenlightened conscience; smitten sorely, till her heart bled, she sought alleviation in self-inflicted punishment and morbid self-denial. More Romanistic than Protestant, she only required to be a professed member of that religion to have become a nun, and would then have sought relief and repose from mental strife in severe fasts and penances. Perhaps she would have worn sackcloth or horsehair, feeling her tortured spirit relieved in proportion as the corporeal nature was made to smart.

My mission failed. Notwithstanding the high hopes entertained of my persuasive powers, I was obliged to return and report my utter want of success. To Mr. Pinnoch I could speak more freely than to Herbert. In all private matters he seemed nearer, more in fact a member of the family, able to enter into detail; while Herbert remained an outsider, a stranger to its history, taking no part in those small concerns belonging to every household.

"Mr. Elmore is right—she is a maniac, or at least a monomaniac," observed Joshua Pinnoch, after listening to such particulars of our interview as I chose to recite; "and the form the malady has taken is to upbraid herself with some imaginary—crime I had almost said," he continued.

"However, we will do better for her than she is inclined to do for herself."

The idea was not a pleasant one, and made me more disinclined than ever to enter her society, or to permit her to cultivate mine. This was the more unfortunate, as being necessarily much at home in the days of my deep mourning, companionship was desirable. It was not likely that Herbert would shut himself up as much as I did. After a while, he had friends at home, went to bachelor's parties, and still oftener dined at his club. When the spring fairly began, he had also the inexhaustible interest of the yacht, which was now his own. We left town early for Ryde, where at my husband's suggestion I had invited the Misses Osborne to spend a part of the summer with me. When they left, he proposed my sending an invitation to Lady Emily, which, meeting with no response, was never repeated.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CRUISE.

WE must open this chapter with another visit to the Beeches. Regarding it now as the future heritage of my boy, the place had considerably gained in interest. Percy was two years and a quarter old, still delicate, and rather pretty. He had light, curly hair, a fair skin, and dark blue eyes—still, large, and deep-set, in which it was easy to imagine lay a world of feeling yet to be developed; but whether for weal or woe was hidden by the veil which so mercifully obscures the future. Often I wondered what his life would be, and how he would bear himself in it. Believing that he partook more of my nervous susceptibility than of his father's calm, easy-going temperament, anxiety had its place in my meditations. However, one advantage he certainly possessed, and that no inconsiderable one for a disposition like his—he could not be a woman, depending so much for happiness on the will and character of her master; but a man, with a power of his own, permitting him in a measure to force circumstances, or, what was far better, by virtue of inherent strength and the active resources incident to his sex, overcome them.

To Lady Elmore he was the beginning of a new life—sweeter, I think, than any she had yet known; he was her treasure, her darling, exercising over her an influence which surprised me. Tenderness flowed from her heart in all her intercourse with him, causing her to lay aside the cold dignity which enwrapped her in her intercourse with the world. She appeared to love him better than anything else;

Lord Elmore I pass over, it is not clear to my mind that he ever occupied a place in her affections. However wounded in feeling, no woman who had once loved could continue to visit resentment and displeasure on a being so helpless—some spark would smoulder among the ashes, and occasionally kindle into a softer memory. For Herbert I had never recognised more than what may be termed an affection of habit, such as some bear towards their belongings, simply because they are theirs. With me she was more friendly than formerly; being the mother of her grandchild, I had entered within a nearer circle. Either I had become more prudent, or more indulgence was extended towards me, for a decided change had taken place. I heard no more animadversions upon my mistakes; my foibles were overlooked, and my faults went unreproved.

Altogether, the visit to the Beeches had ceased to be disagreeable. I had grown to accept it as a matter of course, it slipped away without any particular enjoyment, and terminated without either pleasure or regret.

I felt a certain pride in the old place, and a just appreciation of its attractions. The well-trimmed lawns, the ornamental plats, gay with the brightest of flowers, pleased my eye; also the wooded park and its noble trees, growing with the free luxuriance we so rarely see on the Continent, where the expression English park or English garden has become a distinctive term when trees are not shorn of their natural honours, or dwarfed and cut into deformity. Chiefly I loved the little lake, where the breeze was cool and refreshing, and the early mornings were generally passed on its margin with Percy and his nurse. Although I had not then the passionate affection of some mothers, I was fond of my little Percy, and loved to have him with me in the country. Alone we were good friends, and happy together. It was but natural that Herbert's appearance should make a diversion, and that not in my favour. Percy, forsaking me and also every toy he might have besides, would run into

his arms, or cling about his knees with demonstrative partiality. The young instinct had perhaps already discovered that with me he was not the first, while his father gave him an undivided heart. Conformably with our annual practice, ten days or a fortnight longer would terminate our stay at the Beeches. Herbert was to resume his yachting, and I to spend the intervals of his absence with my sister at Ryde. This was the last year of the lease of my father's villa, and Herbert had placed it at the disposal of the Pinnochs, who, with their children, were established there for the summer.

"Again, papa! again, papa!" These words, and a joyous peal of infantine laughter, attracted me one afternoon to the window of my room. From thence I perceived Percy, in high glee, seated on his father's shoulder, vainly trying to catch at a branch high above his head, which touched but just escaped the grasp of his tiny hand.

"I never expected you could make such a good playfellow, Mr. Elmore," called out Mrs. Kingstone, who, with Mr. Norris, was seated in the shade under the window at which I was standing.

Thus addressed, Herbert carried his burden nearer, when, changing her topic, she said, "So you have lured the Captain away for I know not how long. Are you quite determined to exclude ladies from the invitation?"

"I believe it must be so," he replied, in decided though courteous tones.

"What a pity that Mrs. Elmore dislikes the sea," continued Mrs. Kingstone; "were it otherwise I might perhaps have a chance of accompanying my liege lord. I should like to visit Palestine, and coast along the shores of the Mediterranean. When do you start?"

"In a few days," answered Herbert.

At this point of the conversation, Percy becoming clamorous for more sport, his father carried him off, leaving me rooted to the spot where I stood in wonder and indignation.

An expedition was not only planned, but was on the eve of being carried out, and I heard of it for the first time by chance. I knew that he would go somewhere in his yacht—that was his pleasure every summer; but this was a distinct purpose, an organised expedition, known and discussed by others, while I was left in complete ignorance of his intentions. These reflections did not improve my temper, or elicit any kindly feelings towards my husband. Quite prepared to resent his secretiveness, I only wanted the opportunity, and was hesitating whether to wait till dressing time or go down at once and meet him on the lawn, when my attention was again arrested.

There was no design on my part to listen to the conversation below, yet my ear presently caught a few words from which I could not turn away.

"I am glad Fred has not the means to attempt keeping a yacht," said Mrs. Kingstone; "it is a great temptation to extravagance. All have not the luck of Mr. Elmore. He was more than winged when old Randolph died and left a heap of money behind him; also it is well known that he was over head and ears in debt when he married a rich wife, and cleared himself. I fancy he is in much the same predicament now, if a quarter of what one hears be true. Money slips out of his fingers like a rope of sand."

There was a pause. I could neither see nor be seen, but guessed that Mrs. Kingstone, having communicated her gossip, was looking at her companion for confirmation. Silence at first ensued, but a reply came at last, and was such as might be expected from Mr. Norris, well-bred, yet caustic, one from which Mrs. Kingstone might have benefited, had she been so inclined.

"I am not sufficiently intimate with Elmore to expect to be the confidant of his private affairs, and am, by nature, totally unfitted to receive *on dits* for facts. I believe Mrs. Elmore to be truly attached to her husband."

"And he to her?—that is the point," laughed Mrs. Kingstone.

"I should be slow to receive a suggestion likely to bring unmerited sorrow upon an innocent woman," was the answer; and my heart thanked him, for, perceiving him presently talking to some one else at a little distance, I presumed that, in displeasure, he had left the lady to digest his covert reproof.

In the position in which I found myself, I needed both a friend and a champion, some one who would shield my pride and fling back the malevolent assertions of the world; they might be true, but I could not bear to hear them. Friend I had none now, except my sister, and she was too far removed, as I supposed, from my world to be a fitting counsellor for me. Herbert's debts and extravagance were not new to me; similar reports had reached me before, the sharp edge of the intelligence being made to cut deeper by certain additional words which fell from the speaker in the guise of cruel surmises. Mrs. Kingstone's last remarks had only renewed a painful impression.

As I turned from the window I heard some movement in Herbert's dressing-room, and hoping to find him, entered. It was only his man, making some packing arrangements suggestive of a speedy departure. Leaving the room without speaking, I went downstairs in quest of my husband, and encountered Mr. Norris on the lawn.

"Have you seen Herbert?" I asked, endeavouring to preserve before him a calm demeanour, which was difficult, as I felt he regarded me with more than usual kindness.

"I saw him enter the house with Percy a few minutes ago."

No further information was needed, as he then appeared at the window of Lord Elmore's room, and thither I directed my steps.

He stood where I had seen him, with a more serious face than usual, and his hands in his pockets; not a common

attitude with him, yet he was the only man I ever knew who did not lose in that position. One glance at my face was probably sufficient to reveal something of the storm raging within, and warn him of what was coming. Sorrow I had resolutely put away, and had come in anger to reproach him. My first action, which was to lock the door and put the key in my pocket, left little doubt of the character of the interview to which he had to submit. By superior force, he might of course have gained possession of the key and obtained his liberty; that I knew he would not exert: of all external acts of violence or roughness he was incapable. As I approached nearer, he glanced from me to the lawn; for a moment perhaps the thought of another mode of egress besides the door occurred to him, but only for a moment. He was too much alive to ridicule to permit it to be said that he jumped out of a window to escape from his wife. He looked somewhat uncomfortable as the distance lessened between us, and regarded me fixedly, as he might have done some wild animal, from which he expected an attack.

"This expedition to Palestine, which I overheard Mrs. Kingstone mention, is, I suppose, a settled thing?" were my first words, together with a desperate effort to appear calm. He bowed an assent. "And I am left to collect the first intelligence of a scheme in which I must perforce, next to yourself, be the most interested, from a stranger and by chance!"

"You would have been told of it to-day, or to-morrow at latest," he replied.

"To-day or to-morrow!" repeated I, with acrimony, "and you start in a few days. Is that all the consideration you can show to your wife? In my father's life-time it was otherwise. You did then sometimes remember what was due to me; now that I am nearly alone and have no other protector than yourself, even the poor semblance I once enjoyed is taken away."

Impassive as he generally showed himself to my com-

plaints and censures, which had long lost all novelty, he could not quietly bear this allusion to my father, and, with many signs of impatience, endeavoured to interrupt me as I vehemently set forth my wrongs and his neglect, attributing them to the absence of that influence of which my bereavement had deprived me.

"You know perfectly well my reason for not telling you my plans until the last moment," rejoined he, as soon as a pause in my attack permitted him to be heard; "and, by your present violence, prove the wisdom of my reserve. Were you more reasonable, less violent in your opposition to what you dislike, I should be more communicative. Why should I risk the ruffling of my temper three or four weeks before it is necessary?"

Truth lay in his argument, for it was evident that the possibility of yielding his wishes to mine was not even contemplated. Thinking that I was not coming off with flying colours, I changed my mode of attack, and relating what I had several times heard about his debts and extravagance, asked point-blank what he had done with my father's money.

He was pale now, and his lips became white with anger as he bade me not to interfere with his affairs, adding, "It will be time for you to speak when called upon to part with any of the comforts to which you are accustomed; till then, I claim the right of managing my affairs as I please."

Silenced for the moment, though not answered, and too angry to let him have the last word, I broke forth into a torrent of invective, and finished by accusing him of having betrayed my affection and sought me only for my wealth.

"You know it is true! you do not, cannot, dare not, contradict me!" I continued, with the passionate persistency of a thwarted child, at the same time seizing his arm, afraid that he might escape before my fiery mood had exhausted itself.

Shaking me off quietly, but not roughly, and shrugging his shoulders in a kind of helpless despair, he heaved an impatient sigh, saying earnestly, "O Una! what a senseless, foolish woman you are! What with one complaint and another, you are enough to drive me frantic!"

"You never loved me! dare to say that you did! The world says that you were crippled with debt, and married me for my fortune. Dare to contradict it!" I uttered wildly.

"You remind me of the Duchess of Praslin," he replied, coolly, meeting my frenzied passion with provoking calmness. "She could not rest until, goading her unhappy husband beyond his powers of endurance, she forced him to take her punishment into his own hands, and paid her provocations with her life. Most probably I shall not end the almost daily strife you endeavour to force upon me in his fashion, but I shall rejoice when, as will soon be the case, some hundred miles of salt water roll between us."

"You do not deny that you sought me for my fortune. I heard it said that when you married, you were over head and ears in debt," was my insensate rejoinder.

"Admitting, for argument's sake, your statement to be true, had I no choice in the matter? Was Una Randolph the only person who could offer, according to your view, the requisite attraction? Was there no other young girl in the same position? At least you must allow me to have followed the natural law of selection," he returned, speaking in a tone of cool irony, which served to increase my irritation, inducing me to repeat the charge, upbraiding him at the same time for the mocking tone in which he referred to affections which I considered too sacred for ridicule.

"It has come to this," he said sternly, interrupting me, and striking the window-sill as if to give emphasis, speaking now with as much earnestness as I had done; "you are not satisfied with clouding my life as well as your own by your fancies and tempers, but you will continue your silly non-

sense about disappointed affection, until you destroy the last tiny particle of regard I can ever bring myself to feel for you."

A noise in the passage and a sound of wheels announced that Lord Elmore had returned from his airing. In the state of agitation in which I was, it took a moment or two to find the key. As soon as produced, Herbert, taking it out of my hand, unlocked the door, and Lord Elmore was wheeled in, looking askance from one to the other as he entered, in order to ascertain the cause of his exclusion. Our flushed faces leaving no room to doubt the nature of the scene going on, an idea, natural enough to one of his tried experience, travelled to his rather sluggish brain, and giving his son a knowing nod, he said, "Oh! ah! I understand—a private lecture. Well, bear it as well as you can, my boy, we all come to that at last."

Herbert's reply, if he made any, did not reach me; most probably he was silent, never being very communicative.

As soon as the way was clear, I slipped off and shut myself in my own room, convinced that I was doomed to extract only gall and wormwood from the tie which, three years ago, I had hailed as the greatest happiness to be found on earth.

Though not vain, I could not ignore the fact that I was handsome; the world repeated it so often that I was fain to believe it; yet, till now, general admiration and the decoration of my person had afforded me but little pleasure. A new resolve came over me. Never before had my maid known me so particular about my toilet, or so anxious about my appearance.

Any fixed purpose carried out successfully awakens a degree of satisfaction, and that I experienced as I entered Lady Elmore's drawing-room that day before dinner. At table my spirits never flagged, though the beauty and qualities of the *Ariel* were freely discussed, as well as the expedition in contemplation, and the length of time to be

employed. Herbert himself led the subject, feeling probably that as I was now acquainted with his intentions, there was no longer necessity for reserve.

"I wish I could take the absence of my liege lord as gaily as Mrs. Elmore does hers," observed Mrs. Kingstone, glancing towards my end of the room, where I was exerting myself to be entertaining.

She was annoyed at my disliking the sea, fancying that, had I been willing to go, an invitation would have been given to her.

Lord Elmore remarked that I was a good wife, which caused me to blush, as unmerited praise often does; and Mr. Norris regarded me with a seriousness tinged with sadness, making me believe him more clear-sighted than Mrs. Kingstone, and in a measure conscious of the tumult within.

"I wonder you like to leave your young, handsome wife so long alone," I overheard a gentleman say to Herbert, as we stood about the lawn after dinner. It was an August evening, and the air was very warm.

"You will be well taken care of," observed Lady Elmore, addressing me, having likewise heard the remark. "It would not be wise to discourage your husband in his taste for yachting. Young wives sometimes make sad mistakes in that sort of thing," she added, in a tone more gentle than usual.

Herbert's answer, if he made any, did not reach me, but the reflection made by Lady Elmore changed for a moment the current of my ideas. It seemed strange that people could take such opposite views of one and the same thing.

In less than a week the party at the Beeches was altogether changed. The Kingstones, Herbert, and some others had gone. Partly to gratify Lady Elmore's strong desire to have Percy longer with her, and partly because indifferent where the time was passed, I consented to prolong my stay at the Beeches. To me, all places were just then

alike; two months, at least, had to run their course before my husband came back from his trip. And when he did return, what then? What was likely to occur to alter or improve our relative position? I knew he did not love me, had not loved me even in those early days when he sought and obtained my hand. Long and hard had I struggled against the suspicion; but the strife was over now—I knew it, and fought no more. Sometimes I hardened myself into acquiescence, but more often in bitterness of spirit was disposed to ask with the Patriarch, "What good shall my life do unto me?"

From the Beeches I went to Ryde, and after a long visit to the Pinnochs, by Ellen's advice I accepted an invitation to the Osbornes. After a while, wearying of them, kind and sympathetic though they were, I went to Brighton, and in the beginning of November, according to custom, returned to Upper Grosvenor Street. Having few orders to give, I only wrote the day before my intended return. On entering the hall, I was surprised to see everything in perfect readiness for our reception. The well-trained butler, without speaking, led the way to Herbert's private room, and throwing open the door, brought me into the presence of my husband, who was busily engaged turning out some boxes standing in the middle of the room. His hands were full of something or other, which, on seeing me, he threw down, and welcomed me not unkindly, saying that he had been at home two days, but not knowing where I was, he could not inform me of his return.

Percy's turn came next. Taking him in his arms, first giving him a hearty embrace, he placed the little fellow on the table for closer examination, and after pronouncing him grown and much improved, he began to kiss his face and hands with genuine affection, the child clinging round his neck in an ecstasy of fondness.

The contrast was too great for my nerves. Hastily quitting the room, I ascended the stairs, pretending not to hear

Herbert call after me to take away Percy, as he was too busy to attend to him.

In a few minutes I heard their merry voices on the stairs, Percy striving to relate some childish reminiscence, and his father encouraging the effort with fond paternal affection.

"How shall I grow to my life, and what sort of person shall I become?" were questions which I was mentally revolving, when Herbert, having consigned his boy to the care of the nurse, appeared in the doorway, saying, "I am sorry it so happens, Una, but I must ask you to dine alone to-day. Not knowing that you were coming home, I have a kind of half-bachelor dinner. You should have written earlier."

"Very well, it is of no consequence. I did not know when you were likely to return," I answered, assuming a look of indifference.

As he did not move, I saw there was something more to come. "To-morrow, also, I am engaged," he added.

"Very well," I repeated in the same tone, and began to employ myself in emptying and arranging my travelling hand-bag, as if that were a matter of much greater importance.

He went away without suggesting any companionship in his absence, probably remembering that his former attempts to replace himself had always been coolly received and never acted upon.

CHAPTER XII.

MANŒUVRING.

LITTLE interest is extracted from the details of London life in the season, except for those who, having a part to play and a stake to hazard, watch with eagerness the ebb and flow of chances in which they are concerned. Balls, routs, concerts, dinners, and soirees succeed one another faster than the fair belles can collect either strength or energy to enjoy them. The same events and episodes repeat themselves year after year; actors change, but the drama played on the boards has little other variation than the vagaries which fashion may supply.

In pique and bitterness I began my season with a resolution to live for the world; and by this I meant, to give my time and thoughts, my health and energies, to follow its course, ignorant of the hardness of the service such a master demands. There might be some amusement, there was certainly occupation, however frivolous, in the path I had selected to pursue. Wealth was mine, and a considerable degree of freedom in its employment, Herbert exacting no accountability to him. To the fact that there existed a higher claim, to which all the sons and daughters of opulence must bow and render an account of their stewardship, we were both strangers.

Let me say that though I condescended to court admiration, and sought enjoyment in dress and vanity, it was at the price of my own esteem. Often, when alone, I stamped upon the finery over which I had a few hours before expended both time and solicitude, and still oftener, bidding

my maid carry all away as soon as she had divested me of my dress and ornaments, I dismissed her for the night, and sitting down, wept some of my bitterest tears over the false animation in which I had spent the evening. Once or twice Herbert suggested that my attire, if not too costly, was too elaborate for good taste; that being, however, all the notice it obtained, I paid no attention to his remark. "What he has made me he shall find me," I continually repeated to myself, and soon became his match in that coldness of manner which in him passed in my estimation for indifference; in me it was but a poor counterfeit, for under all ran a torrent of bleeding affection, which sometimes desolated my heart, turning my former love into something approaching to hatred. Indifference in its true meaning could not exist between us; a medium point between like and dislike, love and hatred, equally apart from either, could not represent our mutual position.

Herbert's feelings were, I fear, of a nature less negative, and mine have been already described. I was not jealous in its proper sense—Herbert, distinguishing no one in particular, gave me no cause—but I was ever conscious of not being loved, and resented the defalcation with a fierceness I did not care to control. Thanks to Herbert, the continual miserable altercations in which some wedded pairs indulge did not frequently take place; his systematic avoidance of disputes and wordy warfare saved us from such a degradation, but the amenities of domestic happiness, the tender solicitude, the careless, because natural, expressions of endearment slipping from the tongue in daily intercourse, were never among the sanctities of my home. Whatever be the calibre of the mind, it needs some one to understand it; its serenity depends in a measure on the companionship enjoyed—almost entirely so with those who, incapable of self-government or serious reflection, are put out of tune by every passing breath.

Inconsistent Una! By these observations I would, if

possible, propitiate the favour of my readers, and prepare them to judge me mercifully, more mercifully than I judge myself. Yet in these records of past errors, over which I have mourned in deep humiliation, I am sincerely seeking to warn others from yielding to the temptations of the natural heart in its anger, which wrought such woe to me. If true, as is asserted, that no occurrence, however trifling, leaves us the same as we were before, that every action or thought in our waking moments becomes a part of ourselves for ever, leaving its mark on the present and on the future, we surely have only to realise it to go softly and circumspectly all our days. To believe that, a string in the lyre once jarred, the imperfect melody will go on and on, unable to recover itself, "must give us pause," ere we suffer the harmony of our life, or that of others, to be broken. I will not say that such considerations alone would have preserved me; but if in youth's early day, when the mind drinks in such teaching, I had been instructed in the deceitfulness of my own heart—its utter powerlessness of itself to resist evil, and directed to seek Him who by the Holy Spirit can save from present weakness, infirmity, and sin, I should not have been left to my own poor guidance, nor should I, in this review of my life, have to plunge my thoughts into such a cauldron of bitter memories. Reader! pardon this digression—my heart was full, and would not be repressed in its overflowings.

The narrative takes me back to the outer world. Had ambition been one of my foibles, it would have been gratified. Our entertainments were on a luxurious scale, and often chronicled in the morning papers. Herbert was a good host, and liked to appear in that character. I went out a great deal, occasionally with, but more often without him. We had developed into a fashionable couple, rarely passing an evening at home except in company. If ever we sat down to a *tête-à-tête* dinner, he invariably repaired afterwards to his club, where he found other and more congenial com-

panionship, and amusement of a more exciting character than he permitted himself at home, even when in the society of a few chosen friends. Perhaps he did not wish me to know the direction in which my father's wealth was melting away.

To a spectator, society offers subjects both for amusement and profit, if, like the bee, one is disposed to extract honey from flower and weed. The foolish course I had adopted left me little opportunity of taking the part either of an observer or a thinker. I was most happy when seated beside Mr. Norris, and too engrossed by his conversation to be easily disturbed by the flutterers that usually surrounded me. Let any one recapitulate the vapid nothings to which he or she has listened during the hours of a fashionable reunion, and they will wonder at the patience exercised and the complacency simulated.

My usual attendants rarely rising above the level separating intelligence from trifling, I gladly turned from them to the superior powers of Mr. Norris, when he appeared in our society. He added to my amusement, and sometimes to my interest, by initiating me into some of the by-play which my own unaided observation would not have discovered. Chit-chat with him was always pleasant, and never frivolous; conversation is a word I must not use, as he persisted in holding it too serious for application to the light prattle of women. With some—

> "Discourse may want an animated No!
> To brush the surface and to make it flow."

Not so with him, he never required to be galvanised into interest by opposition. He had always plenty to say, was caustic and pithy, without being ill-natured, lashing only such weaknesses and traits of character as merited ridicule. His faults, if I may point them out, appeared to me a keen appreciation of his own discernment and superiority, and a marked gusto in pouncing upon his victims, pointing out, with raciness akin to enjoyment, who most unconsciously

wore the cap-and-bells in the Vanity Fair that surrounded us. For manhood in its frivolous type he had no mercy; but he was a little tenderer to woman, though few of us, I believe, would be satisfied with the excuses which purchased his leniency. Contrary to most men, he had a high standard for his own sex, and a lower one for ours. He could put up with trifling in woman because he thought it her nature, though willing to do justice to any exception he might discover. The theory of woman's rights was to him the hallucination of lunatics, or the dream of monomaniacs; and, far from giving serious consideration to the arguments adduced in its favour, he would be inclined to shelter its disciples in a *maison de santé*. Man, according to him, was the superior, alone to be crowned with the laurels of fame, or honoured for sense and consistency; and those who fell below the level where he fixed their place, had no portion of his esteem. Severely would he censure those who could pass their time with Folly, amused with the tinkling of her bells, and asking no deeper melody for their heart's music. Specimens of that kind came not unfrequently under his eye, and provoked severe animadversion, leaving me in doubt whether after all I had sounded his real character, and whether there was not a greater depth than I had yet fathomed, a seriousness of mind and a sense of responsibility which, if not religion, seemed to approach it.

"Mrs. Elmore, do you feel any interest in the springing of a gold mine, or in a feeble knight laying down his arms almost as soon as summoned to surrender?" asked he one evening at a crowded party given by Lady B——, taking a seat beside me.

"A little," I replied graciously, prepared to have my thoughts occupied, if not amused.

"Then carry your eye along the room in a line with that lady in pink, seated nearly in front of you, till you stop at the chandelier—what do you see?"

"Two gentlemen in conversation."

"Not so; I dispute your statement."

Knowing my companion's mood by his laconic tone, I waited to have the evidence of my eyes better explained.

"The younger is simply a gold nugget, and the elder a gold digger."

"A gold digger!" repeated I, rather surprised; "he seems to be, or aims at being, an ultra-fashionable."

"With something of the audacity of the sparrow, and the absurdity of the ape—a specimen of a rare genus in which manhood has no part. He has cast covetous eyes upon the gold nugget, and means to finger it. This will be accomplished by means of that pink and white simpering little thing, towards whom they are now advancing. See, the meeting has taken place, and the nugget is going to dance. He has some idea of his own value, and does not intend to be caught; but he is fairly limed, nevertheless. Watch the sparrow—how pleased he is, he can hardly prevent himself from hopping with exultation. Our nugget is not a bad fellow. A pity it is that he thinks himself a match for those who would match him. He has this disadvantage—that his pretensions are greater than his parts. No uncommon case. When we think ourselves the most clever, we are generally on the brink of a false step, or on the edge of a mistake. The younger son of a respectable family, our friend was a little wild in his youth—that is past now: those early follies have been buried in the diggings. He isn't pretty, is he?" asked Mr. Norris, with a sly smile; "but he is a true nugget, nevertheless."

"The best gems, I am inclined to think, may be improved by a good setting," I observed.

"A good setting occasionally passes off a counterfeit, which is not detected till thrown into the crucible. Queen Hortense bequeathed to one of her sons a pair of diamond earrings of great beauty. Not till necessity compelled the

young prince to part with them, did he discover that one was false. Both had the brilliant setting. No, no! I like the nugget all unpolished as it is. By-and-by it will have the honour of being smoothed and shaped, and put into a case by the fair hand it is now holding, to the great satisfaction of the biped of the eccentric movements; and she will be the third daughter he has successfully disposed of to a wealthy partner."

"But will the lady's affection be so easily won?" I asked, in all simplicity.

"Plait-il?" rejoined my companion, dryly, as if not comprehending my meaning.

"You are not so bad as you appear, Mr. Norris—not such an infidel as to disbelieve in the existence of woman's love," I answered, feeling compelled to defend my sex from the impertinent insinuation.

"Instead of mounting the high horse and rebutting charges because unpalatable to accept, look round on the daughters of some of these painted dowagers near you, and tell me what probability there is of finding a genuine heart among them. Are they not evidently brought here as to a market, where their attractions, real or artificial, are most likely to find bidders?"

"Oh! Mr. Norris," exclaimed I, in earnest expostulation. for such ideas emanating from the other sex, and so plainly stated, shocked and distressed me; "have a little more respect, a little more mercy—you are dealing out such hard measure."

"Mrs. Elmore," he said, gravely, "be just and honest. Contemplate seriously these elaborately-adorned maidens, and ask yourself if modesty and good taste, simplicity and natural beauty are in any degree conspicuous. Some few exceptions there may be, some gems of womanhood amongst a multitude of imitations. Yet, I ask in sober earnest, how many of those here present promise a happy and rational life to the men who select them as partners?

Must they not act in the hope that time, circumstances, or some other cause will change these aspirants for Hymen into good practical wives and mothers? I do not say that the ball-room cannot contain such—only this I emphatically aver, I would never go there to seek one. A simple, natural character, with its flaws and faults, is worth more than all this smooth, artificial life, where the smiles are stereotyped and the kindness often hollow. Do you really think these epicene specimens of humanity now prevailing—a bad graft of two characters intended to be dissimilar, and which cannot form one and the same without losing the best characteristics of each—are beings whom we can be expected to esteem and honour?"

Mr. Norris was earnest and eloquent, and I was about to ask how, being so much in the country, he had missed finding some lovely flower "born to blush unseen," when he broke in upon my thoughts.

"That lady, now approaching, has been talking to me; she thinks the conduct of our friend, the gold-digger, shameless and unmanly."

The person to whom he alluded, a handsome woman in amber satin, trimmed with lace, with a nodding plume on her head, giving emphasis to her words as she spoke, passed at this moment and challenged his attention.

"Is it not mean and paltry?" she asked, glancing at the gold-field in question, "so unmanly to turn match-maker, say nothing of the immorality of the thing. You know that the young girl at first declined to be introduced, and in his hearing too; now, having discovered him to be a good *parti*, both father and daughter are palpably endeavouring to catch him. They have not even the grace to hide their game. I am ashamed to see a man so degrade himself."

"Make a little allowance for his position," returned Mr. Norris, quietly; "remember that he has not the advantage of a wife as clever as yourself."

The lady flirted her fan, called him a flatterer, and passed on with a little more colour—not on her cheek, that remained as before, too well covered for a natural blush to improve it, but on her forehead. She had sufficient self-possession to appear to appropriate a compliment.

Mr. Norris laughed softly when she was out of hearing, saying, "You will think me savagely impolite, when I explain my meaning. Her indignation was so ill-timed, that I could not spare her. Not long since she gained her grand desideratum—a rich son-in-law—by a clever shot. Perceiving the gentleman hesitate between her daughter and another, she contrived, at the right moment, to spread a report of the rival's engagement, and secured the prize."

I do not relate these conversations as doing Mr. Norris justice; they amused me at the time, and very often led to serious talk, when a veil seemed lifted, giving me an insight into a deeper and more earnest character than the world generally discovered.

"To-morrow I return to Holmewood, and afterwards intend to go north. Most probably I shall not be in town again this season, so shall not have the pleasure of seeing the farce played out," said he to me at the end of the evening; "but mark my words, the nugget will be appropriated before long; and next winter you will witness a repetition of the same manœuvres, there being yet another daughter to be disposed of."

His prophecy did, I believe, prove true, though ere it came to pass, my life and whole being had experienced such a transformation, that events of that nature had no power to arrest my attention. The whole natural world might have undergone a change, and I should not have regarded it, so absorbed was I in a grief that touched myself alone. Rocks falling from their crested heights and crumbling to pieces in the valleys below, or mountains suddenly stripped of their green honours and laid bare by

the rushing torrent, however exciting to the naturalist or geologist, would have had no interest for me.

Having undertaken the task of reviewing my life, in order to offer its reminiscences as a warning to others, in continuation of the story, I must open many a chamber of memory which, but for this hope, I would gladly shroud in darkness. Like the antiquarian groping among old records, I find much rubbish, much to discard as altogether worthless and uninteresting to others. Bearing, however, in mind, that "as face answereth to face in a glass, so does the heart of man to man," and that real life presents the same sphere for the display of human emotions and passions, though varied and modified by circumstances, I may hope that an experience like mine will not be entirely useless. Chords of feeling can be made to vibrate in most bosoms, if the hand that strikes them be sufficiently skilful; those, however, whom I, in the lowly position of a beacon, seek to benefit, will not require the aid of art or ability, the sympathies of our common humanity being generally easily accorded by the young and tender.

Should one hasty temper be subdued, thwarted will patiently borne, or intemperate word checked, as the young heart sees the bright vision of unalloyed happiness fade, and finds that the prosaic portion remaining will require some self-discipline to secure, then "the secrets of my prison-house" will not have been revealed in vain.

My faults were not uncommon, and the dreary days which they occasioned were their natural consequence. Ignorance and carelessness, more than positive temper or egotism, are the enemies that meet us on the domestic threshold. Did we recognise them as our foes and set to work to conquer them, many days, ruffled and scarred by their effects, would glide smoothly, and leave only sweet and peaceful recollections behind. For want of such knowledge I made shipwreck, not seeing the rocks towards which

I was hastening. Mine is no solitary history; I had moods of good as well as evil, often interchanging, like fits of intermittent fever, a weariness and a sorrow. It must be thus with the undisciplined. Our every-day nature is subject to discouraging fluctuations, rising sometimes with strange anomaly to the heroic, and compelling esteem and admiration; at others yielding to impulses which sink our hearts with shame. Exactly one of that description I have now to relate.

CHAPTER XIII.

JEALOUSY.

I SHALL not accompany you to Mrs. Olliver's, but will look in later in the evening. When you have done with the carriage, send it to fetch me from the club."

These words were addressed to me by my husband as I left the room, where we had, as rarely happened, dined alone—not one of those *tête-à-tête* dinners formerly so enjoyable, but with a full complement of servants, exchanging together, as the process of dining proceeded, only a few trivialities equally uninteresting to us both.

"Very well," I answered. The circumstance was of too frequent occurrence to draw forth opposition. Outward acquiescence in such requests had become a matter of course; deeper I could not go, indifference was as far off as ever. All the empire I had obtained over myself consisted in the power to encase my feelings in a hard reserve, which made my deportment neither more lovely nor lovable. One lesson I acquired, taught more by pride than principle, and that was to turn inwards the seamy side of our domestic history, while the smooth and glossy was exhibited to the world. No one abroad ever knew me to complain of my lot, or let fall a word disparaging Herbert or my home. To have heard the confident, cheerful tone with which, meeting Mrs. Olliver's regrets at seeing me arrive alone, I said he was detained elsewhere, and gave the assurance that he would speedily follow me, no one could have suspected that I was not a happy wife, sharing and reciprocating my husband's confidence, and satisfied myself with the excuses

I offered. That was far from being the case: I was false to myself, false to my best instincts, making use of my intelligence how best to cover them with deception. None guessed that the principal attraction these assemblies had for me consisted in the fact of Herbert's presence, and that till he arrived I was restless and uneasy, however apparently occupied with those around me. To indulge this weakness, the courtesies of reception were no sooner over than I sought to place myself where I could best see the entrance, and watch for his coming—a small pleasure, was it not? since we rarely spoke to each other, except to say when it was time to go home; but I liked to know that he was there, the atmosphere appearing to me lighter and happier than when he was absent.

That evening, I selected my seat with the customary object, and by some means, engrossed perhaps in conversation at the moment, missed seeing him enter. Later, my restless eye discovered him, bright and animated, his blue eyes beaming with softness and pleasure. He was not alone. A diminutive, fairy-looking creature was standing with him, her sweet face all smiles, and her gazelle-like eyes raised in confiding affection. "Jealousy," they say, "is cruel as the grave." I know it can scorch and wither all the tender qualities we possess, and consume every holy feeling. At once I recognised my rival. My heart turned to stone as I gazed at her; every womanly sympathy seemed dried up, and I looked about me with a frightful, pitiless desire for vengeance, in any form that the strong and bitter passion devouring me might suggest.

Prejudice could not deny her power to attract. If she had not the proud beauty which challenges admiration at the first glance, she was sweet and fascinating—possessed of a nameless charm with which, with all my adventitious advantages, I felt myself unequal to compete. Whether listening or speaking, her expression was touching and radiant; no sharp gust of anger had ever swept over that

smooth brow, no drear and hopeless misery had laid its cold hand on her heart. How I envied her as she stood talking, looking so bright and so happy, smiled on by Herbert with such approving affection; her artless bearing and simple attire contrasting favourably with the elaborate toilets around, and principally with my own.

The excellence I would not imitate, I was prepared to hate. It was base, it was vile; for at that moment the qualities Lady Emily possessed, and not the general appreciation of them, formed the subject of my envy. There could be no mistake. The picture in Lady Elmore's room, in addition to the description given by Mr. Norris, harmonised so completely that it needed not Herbert's flushed cheek and altered brow, now glowing with the sunny look to which it had long been a stranger, to confirm her identity. Deeper and fiercer grew my dislike; in the vehemence of this insensate jealousy, I longed to visit my displeasure upon them both. What was it to me that Lady Emily was esteemed and beloved by all that knew her, or that she bore herself sweetly in all the relationships of life? Had she not robbed me of my lawful place in my husband's regard? What was it to me that her friends called her good and amiable, when she had done me so grievous a wrong? I mentally asked, yet soberly viewed, the injury was involuntary, and consisted in throwing me into the shade by unfavourable contrast with herself. Was Herbert himself so faultless that, in his great admiration of her, he could make no allowance for me? I asked, my wrath mounting higher and higher. So wildly raged the storm of passion which her presence had unchained, that not even the appearance of Julie, had she suddenly stood before me conscious of these heart-burnings and pantings after revenge, would have subdued the violence of my feelings, even though she came armed with a prophet's fire, and denounced upon me a sure and certain retribution. A deep and painful jealousy I had long ago conceived towards

Lady Emily, which time had done nothing to assuage; on the contrary, I had silently and persistently nursed it under a presentiment that she would at some time or other work me harm and embitter my existence yet more completely. It was jealousy in its most senseless form, that characterised by Mr. Norris as contemptible and base, for I had nothing to bring against her, save a superiority of mind and principle I made no effort to imitate. It was a mania, a madness, from which I now shrink appalled, though then I hugged it to my bosom as the lunatic might clasp with iron steadfastness the chain that controlled his freedom. Like him, I did not reason, or only in that crooked way which most harmonised with my distorted views. The fatal passion mastered me; whither would it lead me?

Changing my seat to one where, less conspicuous, I could equally well observe them, I watched the pair with indescribable pain, and so intently that I almost caught their words, Herbert's sounding to my imagination so gentle and loving, all redolent of the affection wrested from me. How happy they both appeared, and how changed was Herbert, whether speaking or listening; he was altogether different from the taciturn and sombre personage he had become at home!

Presently, laying his disengaged hand almost caressingly on the little white glove resting on his arm, he looked around. Was it for me? and with the intention of bringing us together? Wishing to avoid the meeting, I drew further back, endeavouring to shield myself from his sight behind a portly lady who was sitting near. All in vain. That sweeping glance had discovered me, and in another second the two were advancing towards me.

"Una, my cousin Emily, of whom you have so often heard," said Herbert, presenting her, adding, almost in the same breath, "I hope she will extend to you a portion of the friendship which I so highly value;" and placed for her accommodation a chair by my side.

Could any reasonable woman take exception at such an introduction, only testifying a desire on his part to procure me a share in one of the good things so dear to himself? But I was not reasonable; I was blind and infatuated. Believing him actuated by the secret hope of benefiting me by the acquaintance, instead of welcoming the improvement to be derived from it, I resented it. Herbert, not Lady Emily, was the one I most wished to wound, though the means employed touched them both. Acknowledging the introduction by a stiff and formal bow, with a set smile I appeared to listen to the few sentences she uttered, and at the first pause commenced a conversation with my next neighbour.

The effect of the insult I did not see, having yet grace enough to lose the courage to look at my victim. When able to turn my head, the two, arm in arm, were disappearing under the doorway of an adjoining salon, and partially concealed by the folds of the velvet draperies. Fear, rather than regret, was the first feeling that rose distinctly from the chaos into which all that was sensible and amiable in my character had subsided. By this time the discovery had been made that Herbert inherited no inconsiderable portion of the unforgiving spirit of his mother. Could I doubt but that now I had deeply offended him? Had I not disgraced myself, and wounded him where he was really vulnerable? Oh! the wickedness which lies latent in the human heart, like the dried herbage of the prairie, requiring only a little spark to commence its devastating operation. Can it be believed that even then a fierce throb of satisfaction mingled with my anxiety. I could even enter into the grim humour of the Frenchman, who in his wrath wanted "to kill his enemy many times."

Too restless to be comfortable where I was, I felt compelled to keep the pair in sight, yet for some time I was unable to leave my seat. Being much admired I was not

long alone, my attention being continually claimed first by one and then by another of our numerous acquaintance, who all seemed provokingly bent on selecting topics of conversation more than ever dry, lengthy, and uninteresting. My replies and remarks must have been a mosaic of ill-fitting pieces, for I answered Yes and No, was glad and sorry, with reckless inappropriateness.

Not for some time was I able to move from the place I occupied. Lionel at last unsuspiciously effected my release. Making his way through the crowd, on perceiving me he was about to secure a seat by my side, when I prevented him.

"I find the air rather oppressive here, I should like to go into another room," I said. With him, to hear a wish expressed was to endeavour to gratify it. His arm was at my service, and in his company I went from room to corridor, and corridor to salon, until the object of my search was attained.

I paused at the entrance of a small room, less brilliant than the others, where the colouring was toned down to the shade most suggestive of a soothing harmony, and the soft light just of that quality to beguile into sweet confidences or brittle vows.

At the further end, on a retired sofa, sat Herbert and Lady Emily, too much engaged in conversation to notice who came or went in the continual ebb and flow of guests. His countenance, once so pleasant and eloquent in its manly beauty, was dark and lined, as if hard thoughts had been busy and were leaving their impress behind, while the lady talked and smiled, looking persuasively earnest. Was she pleading for me? Must I be indebted to her as a shield against the anger I had provoked? The thought was too galling. As the hateful idea presented itself, they rose; the lady had evidently conquered. Her little hand was quietly taken in his, and the moody brow was cleared a little by the light of a faint smile.

"Will you inquire if my carriage is here? I ordered it early."

Lionel, whom I addressed, and behind whom I was partly concealed, turned round immediately. We were standing in the doorway, maintaining a desultory, meaningless conversation, of which I remembered nothing but the burden of making occasional efforts to say something.

"Are you ill? Shall I call Mr. Elmore? He is at the other end of the room."

"On no account. I am perfectly well, only tired and capricious," was my reply, forcing a laugh. "I leave Mr. Elmore to enjoy himself. He is occupied with his cousin, Lady Emily Courland, who, you may remember, at my first visit to the Beeches so piqued my curiosity that I teased every one to tell me whom she resembled."

I hope my voice was steady; I tried to make it so, and spoke carelessly. Lionel only glanced at my face, then silently offering his arm, conducted me to the cloak-room, where he left me hooded and shawled, while he made inquiries about the carriage. Fortunately it was there, and soon conveyed me home, where I retired directly to my room, purposely omitting to give an order for its return to fetch Mr. Elmore. In the absence of orders, it drove to the stable, it being Herbert's general habit to manage for himself when he did not accompany me, or express a wish to the contrary.

"La nuit porte conseil"—an axiom not to be disputed. The proverb does not, however, specify the character of the counsel given. In the chaotic state of mind in which I sought my pillow, no one more required that it should be of a beneficial and soothing character. Never had I been accustomed to govern myself on principle, nor to "take heed unto my ways, lest I should offend with my tongue," but left to the guidance of my natural disposition, the restraints imposed by my affections, or by the rules of the world. Was it surprising that, stimulated to evil by the very

force which under happier circumstances would have held my passions in check, I should now listen to their promptings? In the same mood in which I went to bed did I rise from it—aggrieved, not repentant, prepared to resent with passionate invective the reproaches I expected. The realities of life overpowered me. I would not see that retribution in one shape or another follows our misdeeds. Julie had attempted to impress me with the conviction, but the habitual crookedness and hardness of her theology dimmed both my perception and understanding. I now acknowledge that the conscience is not violated with impunity; sooner or later the punishment comes, whether visible to others, or known only to oneself—whether patent to the public eye, or in the still hours of night, when the anxious brow is shrouded in darkness and the blistering tear falls unpitied and unseen. For good or for ill, there is ready though it may be secret compensation, bringing its blessing or its ban into the sanctuary of the heart.

Up to this moment the revenge I had tasted was more sweet than bitter; it remains to be seen whether poison might not be lurking in the lees. It is dangerous to set in motion a rolling stone which may fall and crush you beneath its weight. Who can command a passion once voluntarily indulged, saying, "So far and no farther"? Like the letting out of water, it breaks down the feeble barriers we would oppose, and carries us with resistless force where we never intended to advance.

Strong in my resolve to defend myself, making Herbert's general indifference my excuse, I took my accustomed place at the breakfast-table the following morning. Such had been my general practice, and since our estrangement had become so decided, I had more regularly adhered to it. Many reasons induced me to continue the custom. In the first place, at that meal being generally alone, I fell naturally into the habit of ministering to my husband's wants in the little domesticities of the breakfast-table, and lastly,

though not the least powerful among my motives, this was a means of keeping me in a measure instructed in his projects and occupations for the day. The paper, too, usually shared his attention, yet the repast rarely concluded without a few words, from which perception keen as mine could not fail to gather a portion of the information I desired.

I had not seen Herbert since the events of the past evening. He came home very late, after I was asleep, and did not leave his dressing-room. On this morning I was first in the room, and had made breakfast when he entered. His brow was cloudy and his face serious, apparently more preoccupied than usual. Handing me the *Morning Post*, he took up *The Times*, dividing his interest between its columns and his breakfast, without any reference to the scene of yesterday.

The last cup of coffee finished, he pushed back his chair, and rising, went to the fireplace, standing a little behind me. Thinking the quarrel about to commence, I concentrated my energies for the strife.

Surprise rather than satisfaction followed his opening remark. "We are not to dispute over the past. I have given my word not to resent in any way your conduct of last night, nor even to comment upon it. Emily has not only forgiven you, but seeks your friendship, and will endeavour to overcome your strange and unjustifiable enmity in her own sweet way—that is, by love and kindness."

He paused, most likely to give me time to contemplate the loveliness of the picture he placed before me, little dreaming that the invidious comparison thus tacitly made and the genuine admiration he bestowed were stirring up more evil. As I anticipated, Lady Emily had procured my forgiveness, or, to speak more correctly, had secured me from open reproaches. I owed to another the forbearance I could not win for myself. The situation was intolerable.

Brooding over the galling thought, I remained silent, and he continued: "The friends with whom she came to

London leave town to-day. I have therefore asked her to remain a few days with us. She will be here this afternoon at four o'clock. It is her wish that you meet as if for the first time, without any allusion to yesterday. After her arrival, it will be well, I think, to take a drive in the Park together, and in order to facilitate the removal of any awkwardness you may not be able to prevent, I will accompany you."

Very nicely was it all arranged, was it not? and once more, so to speak, I held my fate in my own hands. At any other time a drive so accompanied would have given me unalloyed pleasure, now the proposal only served to give greater vigour to my secret irritation.

When he had finished speaking, I looked up. His countenance betokened some anxiety. Though desirous for me to accept matters as they stood, I fancied him a little doubtful of my consent, and to remove the fear, I inquired, with hypocritical calmness, how long Lady Emily purposed to remain with us.

"Only a few days," replied Herbert; "she must return to her mother, who, being an invalid, cannot spare her long."

I say with hypocritical calmness, because I was playing a part in furtherance of a preconcerted plan, by which I intended to humiliate a rival and mortify my husband.

"Shall I order the blue or the green room to be prepared for her?" asked I, rising, laying my hand upon the bell, and by this movement stood close to Herbert's side. Did I overact my part, or was it the mere consequence of proximity that made him so intently fix his eyes upon my countenance?

"Such points must be left for you and Mrs. Watson to decide," he replied, and withdrawing his searching gaze, which I bore without shrinking, he slowly walked out of the room, repeating as he reached the door, "Four o'clock, remember."

From the breakfast-room, all who went and came by the street door were easily seen. Waiting until I heard it close, I looked through the window, and saw Herbert really off. Lest he should return, I waited nearly half-an-hour, and then, repairing to my room, summoned my maid. My purpose was nothing less than to absent myself, and place the two whom I wished to punish in an awkward dilemma—for Lady Emily, perhaps the greatest humiliation that one woman could inflict upon another.

Ordering a few things to be hastily packed, only the strict necessaries for a three days' absence, I next visited the nursery to kiss and pet my boy. I was too late, he had just gone out for his morning walk. That did not much disturb me, the nurse was trustworthy, and I should not be long away, three days at most; besides, his father never entered or left the house, were it six times a day, without going to the nursery. Next sending for William, the footman more especially attached to my service, I bade him fetch a cab and prepare to accompany me to the city, not intending to use the carriage, secrecy as to my destination being the principal point of my programme.

In less than two hours after breakfast was over, I had left my home! Infatuated with the idea of my revenge, and blind to consequences, I quitted my husband's roof rejoicing in the success of my plan, and never reflecting that by such a step I voluntarily withdrew from his protection, and perchance raised a barrier between us, which no after regret on my part might be able to break down. I did not foresee that the shrine in which I gloried might possibly separate my life from one whom, even in the moment of leaving, I loved with such passionate earnestness.

Lose not patience, gentle reader; I erred, and paid the bitter penalty. Remember rather that, were the record of this life's sufferings fairly noted down, and effects traced to their legitimate cause, the greater part would be found to

emanate from our own follies—the natural fruit of the tree which we had ourselves planted.

As far as my arrangements were concerned, all turned out but too well. Few impediments spring up in the path of evil—only when we seek to retrace our steps are we fully aware of the thorns and obstacles which lie in the way.

Unhappily, my father's thoughtful kindness, by giving me a plentiful supply of money, facilitated my flight. On reaching the city, I sent William with the cheque previously prepared, and, on receiving the money, dismissed him, taking the precaution to cover my retreat by a false direction to the coachman. Vain and futile foresight! laughable even for its worthlessness, were not the question at issue so momentous. Who was likely to pursue and arrest the fugitive in the dangerous course adopted? Not Herbert—I had too long been a burden and a thorn in his side, and no other could have influenced me. A word of affection, felt to be true and genuine, would even then have scattered my wild passions to the winds and swayed me to a better line of conduct. The influence came not, and I deliberately walked into the deep waters of a great sorrow.

As soon as William was out of sight, I stopped the cab and desired the driver to proceed to the London Bridge Station, Brighton being my real destination.

My object being to escape recognition, I selected a quiet hotel, and was fortunate in procuring a comfortable apartment, ordered luncheon, and occupied myself with watching the unpacking and arranging of the things the maid had brought with us. That done, I was alone—and my punishment commenced. I could not run away from myself, I could not silence the small voice which whispered suspicions of the impolicy and impropriety of the step I had taken. The passion which had sustained me by degrees burnt itself out, leaving sober reason as my companion. Her reflections were confused and bewildering. Return in time to efface the insult intended by my flight was im-

possible; it was already past four o'clock, and the mischief had been done. Would Herbert's anger be very great, and how would he testify it? were the points most frequently dwelt upon. Finding no satisfactory answer, I gave up thinking; indeed, before nightfall my brain and heart were too sick for further effort. One torturing regret stood out in full relief. Lady Emily's friendship, which I had so ruthlessly cast away, might have been the help I needed—not only a means of advantage to me, but a bond of union between Herbert and myself. Although I determined to return home by an early train the next day, the night must intervene, and the hours in prospect seemed so long and passed so slowly, that I went to bed early, hoping to lose both time and anxiety in the forgetfulness of slumber.

CHAPTER XIV.

A NIGHT AT BRIGHTON.

AS might have been expected, I could not sleep. Long into the night I tossed wearily on the pillow, my feverish thoughts roving hither and thither without object, like restless spirits in their wanderings. After vainly trying every known art taught from childhood upwards to induce slumber—counting sheep into a fold, watching a fallen branch float down a stream, saying over the multiplication table, &c., I gave up trying, and determined merely to close my eyes and remain quiet in the same position. It did not seem that I had been long in that state of quietude, when I was disturbed by a noise, probably the falling of a cinder in the grate, and was startled into looking about me. It was an April evening, and so mild, that more for company than warmth, a fire had been lighted in the room. Whether then burning or not I had no idea, for my attention was immediately absorbed in another way. A clear, white light streamed across the floor, brighter and colder than any moonlight I ever remember, and fell upon various objects not before observed, throwing over the room an air of singularity which puzzled me. A portion also came upon the bed, one of those old-fashioned four-posters, curtained and valanced, rarely seen out of England. I say a portion, because I soon became aware that its reflection was interrupted by a dark shadow at the foot, which, whether flesh or spirit, preserved the outline of a human form. Erect and motionless it stood, while I gazed in stupid terror, which was further increased by a ray falling from some un-

expected quarter and revealing the sinister countenance of Master Wenham, not cold and inanimate as in the picture, but living and breathing—his very bodily presence. An icy chill crept over me. What was he doing there, and what did he want with me? His appearance boded no good, and vividly recalled that first impression of dislike conceived when my eye rested on the portraits in the gallery at the Beeches. In vain I tried to address him and ascertain his business, my tongue refused to move, all articulation was impossible, and a perspiration of terror gathered about me. If no one came to my aid, I felt that I must then and there die of fright. Hoping to shut out the hateful vision by burying my head under the clothes, I made the attempt, but a heavy weight prevented my raising them, and an unaccountable rigidity held me immovable.

Just then Master Wenham, raising his arm, beckoned me to rise and follow him, retiring a few steps backwards at the same time, as if to make his meaning plainer. I had not courage to do so, but lay still, quivering and shuddering with fear and cold, until vexed at my delay, he began to gibber some unintelligible words, of which I could only guess the purport to be angry threats at my refusing to comply. "You had better go with him," whispered a voice close to me. I could see no one, but the tone sounded friendly. Believing that to obey was the sole means of ridding myself of the obnoxious presence, I rose without further delay, and slipping on a wrapper, I thrust my feet into my slippers and stepped forwards. Master Wenham then took my hand and smiled—a horrible smile! Many years have passed since that night, yet I can even now recall something of the thrill of dread which passed through my frame at that moment. Leading me to the further end of the room, he opened a door in the wall, unnoticed before, so well was the panelling adjusted, and we entered a long corridor. Light streamed before and behind us, whence issuing I could not conceive, the door having been

immediately closed as soon as we had passed through. After much wandering round corners and along passages, with no other object apparently than to puzzle me by the intricacy of the way, we stopped at a small door sunk in the wall, where it was necessary to descend a couple of steps. He opened it, and we entered a large room. A blaze of light met my astonished gaze. Candles, lamps, candelabrums, lustres, sconces—every imaginable receptacle of light had been pressed into service. I was dazzled, overwhelmed—my brain ached—the unnatural brilliancy was intolerable. Becoming after a time accustomed to the vivid illumination, I saw that one corner of the vast room was comparatively dim, and looking at my guide, thus silently asked permission to shelter my burning eyeballs in the friendly gloom. He consented, and led me forward until we stopped before an object I had not at first remarked. It was a kind of bed, made by trestles, supporting a mattress covered only with a sheet, but under it, judging from the outline, lay a human form. I had no doubt but that I was in the presence of a corpse, though why Master Wenham had brought me there, and what he expected of me, were mysteries I could not even attempt to unravel. After a short pause, to give me time to feel the solemnity of the scene, he made me a sign to raise the sheet. Then I rebelled; I would not, I could not, and should have run away, but for the strong hand which held me fast. Riveting his relentless eye upon me, as if to make sure that my attention did not falter, he slowly lifted it himself, and beneath—oh, anguish unspeakable!—I recognised the noble features of my beloved Herbert, still and rigid. He was dead! I know not what I did—it may be I threw myself upon the bier, but I remember hearing a shriek so sharp and piercing that it rang through the chamber. It was the cry of a broken heart in its agony. The sound startled me so much that I looked round to see whence the noise proceeded, and found myself again in the room where I had

gone to sleep, if indeed I had slept, which was now doubtful. A full moonlight poured into the room as before, bringing one-half of it into distinctness, and there—yes, at the foot of the bed, still remained, though not so clearly, the dark shade I had taken for Master Wenham.

In order to convince myself that I was awake, I sat up in bed. Surely it was no dream! I was able to move as I pleased, and the light and the figure were still there. A fear I could hardly endure was fast overmastering me. I put out my hand to ring the bell, but ere grasping it I fortunately remembered that, being in an hotel, such a summons in the dead of night would not bring my own maid but strangers, to whom I should feel some delicacy in explaining the cause of my alarm. Calmed a little by this reflection, instead of ringing I struck a light, when the cause of my disturbance disappeared. Two or three times I repeated the experiment of lighting and extinguishing the candle, and always with the same effect. In the dark the shade reappeared, and vanished as soon as the light was kindled. Convinced now that my imagination had run riot in a wild, unmeaning dream, but with impressions on my mind of too painful a nature to keep quiet, I quitted my bed, and, candle in hand, proceeded to examine the room, feeling unable to rest until the cause of the shadow had been ascertained. Nothing that came under my notice appeared to project it. After patient examination, I was obliged to give up the search and force myself to be satisfied with the conclusion that some part of the furniture, by intercepting the moonlight pouring in from the large bay-window, the shutters of which the maid had omitted to close, was the agent in my alarm, and that Master Wenham was as innocent as canvas and oil could be, in a scene where he had played so disagreeable a part.

My mind still unhinged, and requiring to exchange vague surmises for reality, I stepped out upon the balcony and indulged in a long gaze upon the sea, whose waters spark-

ling in one continuous line of light looked like a silver ribbon upon a cold grey surface. Onwards and onwards they rolled, with a monotonous murmur, as one after the other the wavelets—gentle now—beat against the shore, retiring with the same regularity, each wave rattling the rounded pebbles as, with spent energy, it swept down the slight decline and returned to the parent bed. Soothed at first, I listened with pleasure, till wearied by the constant repetition the vast sea, the still night, the uninterrupted moaning, made me sad. Nor was I consoled when I raised my eyes. The scene, though beautiful, harmonised too little with my present state of mind. Over all shone the moon, arrayed in splendour, moving across the heavens in more than usual majesty, an embodiment of calmness terribly in contrast with the things of earth—of this restless, stirring, heart-aching humanity. The varying ocean suited me better. Though smooth now, the surging depths were there, liable to be lashed into fury. Not an unfitting emblem of myself, who, but for that same uncertainty of character, would not have been in my present situation—a solitary woman, a prey to remorse and apprehension, keeping her night-watch while happier denizens of the world were sleeping.

Quieter views prevailed before long. With that vast expanse before me, girdling so large a space that, while its waters peacefully murmured along miles and miles of our coast, its agitated billows might be raging and tossing on the shores of other lands, thought would not be circumscribed into the little circle in which it usually moved—I the centre, and my fancies and feelings the unvarying measure. These standing out as the sum total of existence—what others owed to me, not what duties I owed to them. God and my neighbour had never had their claims acknowledged or examined. Self overruled juster considerations; and every transgression, from without brought to this bar, which was at once accuser and judge,

met with little mercy or forbearance. Where Herbert had failed towards me I saw with wonderful keen-sightedness. How much better for us both it would have been had I turned the scrutiny inwards, and exercised a wholesome severity against the principal offender!

The unchanging mournfulness of the cadence, as each approaching wave struck the shingle at measured intervals without pause or change, brought time and eternity before me in a new light, the sombre recollections of the past hour having tinged my reflections with unwonted soberness. This life, which had so absorbed my being to the exclusion of any sincere care for a better, must cease, while the waters would murmur on under the same bright moonlight, but with this difference—before another spectator. And where should I be? The answer was a dull pain at my heart, which I tried to relieve by a spontaneous prayer to suit the feeling of the moment. Far from being at home in the exercise, I have a recollection of a confused jumble of the spiritual and personal. My desires were chiefly earthborn, for I shrank with anguish from the idea of life closing before I had tasted a little more of its happiness. The dreadful dream-vision of my dearly-loved Herbert taken away, returned to fill me with dismay. Stretching out my hands into space and looking upwards, believing myself better heard where the stars were shining, I supplicated both for his life and mine, my heart palpitating with fear and contrition. What would existence be when he had passed away for ever? was the burden of my grief. Strange that this infatuated love had such power to work upon my feelings, and so little in teaching me to express it in a manner which could stamp it with value! Was not this the secret—that being purely selfish it was treason to the spirit of true affection, which is patient, gentle, and self-denying. Quickly letting slip the spiritual thread, which had only momentarily sustained me, I held fast the earthly, crying out in my excitement, "Herbert, my beloved,

my own love, my husband, let us begin our domestic life again. I will be so careful to avoid those reproaches and murmurings that vex you so much; you shall be unfettered by my humours and fancies; I will stand aside and wait patiently till your heart calls me; and then, instead of upbraiding as heretofore, I will thank you for the little you may be able to give me." This and a great deal more I addressed to him, as if he had been there in person, so completely was I carried away by the influences of the hour. Promises fell fast from my lips, ratified equally quickly by my heart. Amongst them was one, sincerely intended to be kept at the time—that was, to seek Lady Emily, ask her forgiveness, and, as far as lay in my power, to take her for an example. That she would despise my penitence and reject my overtures was highly improbable. The testimony of those who knew her best, as well as her forbearance under the first provocation I offered, forbade the suggestion.

"There is a triad of men," said one of the British Fathers, "the man of men, who returns good for good, and evil for evil; the man of Satan, who returns evil for good; and the man of God, who returns good for evil." Of the three, I believed Lady Emily belonged to the last; and I built some hope for the future upon her influence, which, far from rejecting with disdain as being derogatory to me, I was now inclined to seek, so genuine was my regret under the pressure of the startling adventures of the night. A little calmed, as my thoughts resolved themselves into a purpose of action, I left the window.

The pillow did not tempt me, the recollections connected with it being too painful; so, sitting down, near enough to the bed to keep watch over the shadow, hoping either to prevent its return or ascertain its cause, I soon fell into a real sleep—dreamless this time, for it was fast and sound. After a while I awoke, stiff and chilly. The window was still open, the candle low in the socket, and only a pale

reflection of moonlight in the room, which fell in one long, narrow line, as if a single ray, detached from the parent source, had accidentally been left behind.

Shaking with cold, but now thoroughly awake, and practical enough to feel that good sleep and better rest than any I had this night experienced would be the best preparation for the morrow, I got into bed, first drawing the curtains carefully round to prevent myself being disturbed by any reflected object, and slept till a late hour in the morning. As far as was practicable, I carried out my resolve of the night—that is, I left Brighton by the earliest train in my power. After an absence of twenty-four hours, I was on my return to the home I ought never to have quitted.

Taken as a whole, twenty-four hours compose no large portion of a human existence. Many such fragments of time slip away unregarded, receiving, as we think, no impress and leaving no mark. That is a great mistake. They may not record their passage on our own minds by recollections standing out in sharp relief, or regrets cut and graven with iron force upon the conscience; but they are not annihilated, whether we remember them or not. Again they must appear and show their tablets. Where we have written nothing our Arch-Enemy will have traced much. Time unemployed will, in the great day of account, be found to have been time misemployed, as we clearly read in the story of the unprofitable servant. For me, however, these last twenty-four hours had a greater importance than the twenty-four years I already numbered, as they changed the whole future of my life. A few mists were cleared from my eyes, and faint rays of light admitted from the truths and facts so long obscured and contorted; but I was by no means either so enlightened or so changed as I supposed. I knew I had been much in fault, and expected that that acknowledgment would be sufficient to obliterate my offence and make up the quarrel I had provoked. Above

all was I resolved, when once reconciled to Herbert, never again to risk my peace by the indulgence of those moods and complaints hitherto so common.

Soothing myself with these one-sided views, with tolerable complacency I watched the space diminish between me and my home. The sanguine temperament natural to me had even outstripped my reconciliation. Before leaving the railway I had mentally received one of Herbert's old sunny smiles, and expressed my willingness to sit at Lady Emily's feet, a lowly disciple, anxious to be taught.

CHAPTER XV.

THE RETURN.

ARRIVED in Upper Grosvenor Street, the coachman's loud knock seemed to beat a rat-tat-tat on my heart as well as on the door. The butler and William both appeared; the former, entrenched in his dignity. remained in the doorway; while the latter came forward to assist me, taking, as I thought, especial care not to raise his eyes so as to encounter mine. Ordering him to pay the coachman, I entered the house, passing the butler without speaking, and went into the dining-room. Although not much after the usual luncheon-hour, there was no appearance of that meal, yet the nurse knew that I liked Percy to dine downstairs. From thence I mounted to the drawing-room, the air of the house striking me as unusually still. Here the partially-closed blinds, and a nameless look of undisturbed order, raised an indefinite uneasiness. William, speedily following, began to draw up the blinds. Bidding him send Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper, to me, I went up another flight of stairs to my own room. Mrs. Watson was my father's servant, and having lived with us from my childhood, stood in a nearer relation than that which merely binds mistress and dependant together. In my anxiety to know how my husband received the intelligence of my absence, I applied to her, feeling sure that she would make the narration with truth and fidelity. Making allowance for the want of certain objects in daily use which had been taken away with me, my room was just as I had left it. Not so was Herbert's dressing-room, whither I at once

proceeded. Throughout its whole extent—and it was large and fully furnished, often serving him for a sleeping-apartment—reigned complete disorder, as if the fairy of that name had been keeping her highest revels. Drawers were half open, presses unclosed, papers and bits of letters scattered over the room, and all the appurtenances of the toilet removed. What did this betoken? Without giving myself time to think, I rushed into the nursery, and here a trembling foreboding came over me. The disorder was even more complete. The open doors of wardrobes revealed their emptiness, except for a frock or a cape past service; the drawers, mostly open, had been well ransacked; chairs and tables, evidently displaced by the impatient hand of haste, were pushed into corners, and broken toys were strewn about the floor. One of Percy's shoes was in one place, and its fellow in another.

The truth flashed on me—I was a childless mother! an abandoned wife! My schemes, my hopes, my good resolutions were all as empty air, and vanished in a moment. I remember a sensation of sickness and cold, my limbs felt rigid, and mists rose before my eyes. . Unable to see or stand, I put out my hands to catch at some support. Perhaps nothing was near, I clutched at vacancy, tottered and fell, hearing, as I came to the ground, a shriek so strange that I did not recognise my own voice. My next recollection was of kind, pitying tones, and the gentle moving of hands about me, also an acute pain in the head. On raising my hand to the aching part, it was firmly put away, and the voice of Mrs. Watson said, "No, dear lady, do not touch it. Let me first wash away the blood from your hair, and then we will bind up the wound. It is an ugly cut, but only a flesh wound. A little patience, dear lady; you will soon be better."

This was said because, having now opened my eyes, and perceiving my hand and dress covered with blood, I had again endeavoured to touch my smarting head.

"Shut the door and lock it; let no one enter," were my first words. Being now conscious, I had a distinct impression of what had happened, and where I was. "Now tell me all, I am ready to hear," said I, as soon as the order had been executed, my physical suffering subdued under the stimulus of anxiety, and using indefinite language, because I knew not how to frame my wishes. It was enough; Mrs. Watson knew perfectly well what information I wanted, and replied, "Let me first bandage your head properly, and then——"

Silently she performed all that was necessary for healing the cut, before offering me some lavender-drops, which she fetched from an adjoining closet. Partly to content her, and partly because, beginning to feel faint, I feared my consciousness might leave me, I took some, then, leaning back in the chair where she had placed me, I folded my hands together, closed my eyes, and waited.

"Tell, tell quickly!" I began, with childish impatience. "I left the house at eleven o'clock, and Mr. Elmore came home——"

"About luncheon-time," added Mrs. Watson, continuing her story. "Not finding any preparations on the table, he asked for you. 'My mistress is not at home,' said the butler, who had followed Mr. Elmore into the room for the express purpose of being questioned. 'Where is she?' 'Gone out, sir.' 'Where?' 'I don't know, sir. Mrs. Elmore left the house this morning at eleven o'clock, with William and West: William soon returned, but not my mistress.' That being all he had to tell, he was dismissed, and William summoned in his stead. Nearly the same questions were put and answered, and then William came for me: Mr. Elmore wanted me in the dining-room. I went, wondering why he asked for me, having nothing to tell. He was walking up and down the room, but on seeing me, stopped short in the middle."

"How did he look?" asked I, too eager to wait, and

hoping to draw conclusions faster than her narration permitted.

"Pale and serious, rather haughty too, I thought, as he bade me draw nearer; for having made my curtsy, I remained standing close to the door."

His high carriage revealed nothing. Mrs. Watson was no favourite with him; belonging as she did more particularly to my family, her attachment and interests were mostly with me. These minor shades of jealousy occur in most households, and in ours were of no moment, Herbert rarely interfering with domestic arrangements.

"What next?" said I, eagerly.

Mrs. Watson resumed: "'So your mistress is not at home—where has she gone?" 'I don't know, sir.' He looked hard at me as though he did not believe my words; and I said, 'William thinks she is gone to Brighton, for he watched the cab turn in the direction of that station. Perhaps she felt to want a little sea-air, she was unwell when she came home last night.' I said so, and hardly know why, except because I was nervous, he looked at me so fixedly. It was not my place to give an opinion, as he soon taught me by a sharp reprimand, and then asked, sternly, 'Do you know where your mistress has gone?' 'No, sir,' said I, and then waited his further pleasure in silence. 'I sent for you,' he continued, 'to tell you to prepare Master Percy's dinner immediately; provide also something for the nurse.' With these words, he turned from me to the fireplace, and began stirring together the few embers left in the grate, but without intention, for when I stopped and would have put coals on the fire, he waved me away, saying shortly, 'Not wanted.' I had no sooner left the room than the bell rang violently; it was to order the carriage. From the dining-room, Mr. Elmore went to the nursery, and in a few minutes the whole house was in a bustle. Nurse had received instructions to pack such things as were necessary for Master Percy and herself,

immediately, and to be ready in less than two hours to start for the station. I heard they were to go to the Beeches at once, and that the rest of their things were to be sent after them, every article that either the one or the other could require or claim; those were Mr. Elmore's own words. All hands went to work, there was such a confusion and running about. What could not be packed at the time was finished afterwards, and sent in the evening. Mr. Elmore took no luncheon, but kept going backwards and forwards from the nursery to his own room, where his valet was also busily engaged in packing. I did not see Mr. Elmore again till the boxes were in the hall and the carriage at the door. 'Is there any message to my mistress? she will soon be back, I am sure, sir; she only took a few things with her,' said I, meeting him coming out of the dining-room, leading Master Percy by the hand. 'None whatever,' he answered, sharply, and catching the little boy up in his arms, he carried him to the carriage and put him by his side, the nurse following. Then giving directions to his valet to convey all the boxes already packed to the station, and to wait his arrival, he told the coachman to drive off.

Here Mrs. Watson stopped, but with that inflection of the voice which left the auditor listening, certain that there was something more to come.

"And what then?" said I.

"William told me that they drove to a house in Brooke Street, where Mr. Elmore paid a long visit. When he came away, he desired William to procure a cab and accompany his cousin, Lady Emily Courland, to the station where he and Master Percy were then going. That is all, ma'am; I know nothing more," said Mrs. Watson, when she had reached this point of her story, which I have endeavoured to give as related—not a very difficult task, for the whole was burnt, as it were, upon my heart and memory.

After she had finished there was silence; I was too

crushed to utter a word, and she appeared too absorbed in the better arrangement of the bandage on my head. Truly my sin had found me out, and I was left alone with my conscience and my punishment. It had come quickly and fallen heavily. "Alone, absolutely alone—forsaken!" repeated I, mentally; and not being able to vent my distress otherwise, I rocked myself backwards and forwards in the chair and moaned—a low, mournful moan, which Mrs. Watson attributed to the pain in my head, which, however, under the severe pressure of my sense of isolation, I did not even feel.

With soothing words my humble friend raised the wet hair from my forehead and washed away the blood, assuring me that I should soon be better, repeating, at the same time, her conviction that the cut was of a proper kind, though rather deep, and would quickly heal. She talked only of the hurt; but when I opened my eyes, there was such compassion in her face, I could not doubt her feeling sorry for something more than the injured head. I struggled hard to be strong, but it would not do. Pride, rather than spirit, had hitherto sustained me; both now completely failed. The pity I read in her half-averted eye, and in the touch of her hand as she stroked back my hair, overcame my last attempt at self-control, and sinking my head till it rested on a table near, I sobbed as one rarely sobs out of childhood.

"Dear lady, take heart; you will soon be better," said she.

Better! did Mrs Watson think so herself? I believe not; but with a tact beyond her station, supported by her personal attachment, she ignored the deep mental suffering I was enduring.

"Alone! henceforth alone, always alone!—and I am so young, and wish so much to be happy!" I thought, for I saw in the step Herbert had taken—in this instantaneous resolve immediately carried out—a resentment not easily

mollified, and a purpose not likely to be changed. My efforts, my pleadings, would alike be powerless. I felt also, and the conviction cut deep, that there existed no sentiment in his own bosom, no tenderness of retrospection which might raise regret for the separation. On the contrary, there was the fear of his rejoicing too much in his freedom to be willing to wear again the chain which I had often made galling, and had now so recklessly broken. The length of life before me increased my despondency. My youth appalled me, for I forgot that that, even more frequently than age, fell before the scythe of the spoiler.

Part of my soliloquy I probably uttered aloud, as Mrs. Watson quickly remarked, "You are not well enough to be left alone. The servants have had their dinner. I will just prepare you a bit of luncheon, and then I will step round to Conduit Street, and ask Miss Kenyon to come and keep you company."

"On no account!" exclaimed I, roused by the dread of such uncongenial fellowship.

"But you will be so melancholy by yourself, ma'am." My loneliness distressed her, deepened as it then appeared by the disorderly state of the nursery, where I and everything else was out of order.

Any loneliness seemed to me preferable to Julie's company. Her society was not what a suffering heart would willingly seek. At such seasons the voice that would soothe must whisper its consolations in the softest tone, or it will wound rather than heal, for the susceptibilities are keen, even to sickness. Only He who made the heart, He who set in motion the complicated parts of that wonderful instrument, can touch it with the gentleness and skill which probes as a preliminary to healing. This helpful knowledge was not mine at the time of which I am writing. My principles, such as they were—better described as that sense of propriety which passes for principle in the world—were of no use whatsoever. From poor Julie I expected no com-

fort; her hard opinions and swift denunciations upon every transgression frightened me. I would rather be without her.

"I will go to my room," said I, in a low tone, to Mrs. Watson, and to myself, lower still, "It is my own doing; I will try and bear it."

My first words to Mrs. Watson, when I had entered my room, were to request her to have it darkened. I could not bear that the light of day should look upon misery like mine—sunshine was for those for whom life meant something bright and stirring, not for me, for whom all its beauty and glory had passed away, and to whom no incentive for exertion remained.

"Now, ma'am, I will send you something to eat. You had quite a journey this morning," observed Mrs. Watson, having executed my order to the letter.

"Nothing now; I cannot eat," I answered, a little fretfully, I fear, for the offer of food irritated me; but checking myself, I added, more gently, "Leave me now, I want quiet. Let no one come near me until I ring, and then come yourself; don't let West approach me." I was especially anxious for Mrs. Watson, for your maid is either a friend or a spy. I classed mine among the latter, perhaps unjustly; but she was hard, likely, I fancied, to note down every mood and glance which could be retailed for the gratification of the servants' hall.

Mrs. Watson still lingered. "Let me light the fire, ma'am; you may be cold when the sun is down."

I had no sensation of cold, only a craving to be left quiet; so, declining the fire, I glanced towards the door. She took the hint, and after laying a large shawl over my feet, softly went away.

That was a strange kind of quiet which followed Mrs. Watson's departure, prostration might be the better term, the slipping away of all vital energy. I lay very still on the sofa, neither thinking nor feeling, until roused after a time

by a thin ray of light entering from some small opening, and falling upon the writing materials. No idea of appealing to my husband's heart occurred to me; I formed no part of the gladness of his life; I could be put aside easily with little if any regret; while I felt—I knew—it burned into my brain in fiery characters—that there was this terrible difference between us—my loss might be his gain. Life could and would pass merrily with him; he had his yacht, his friends, all the resources for which he cared; while to me the days must drag themselves wearily on, the same dull tale from morning to night, without object and without hope. Suddenly I thought of putting forward a mother's right. A confused idea, whence obtained I know not, that the law would support my demand to have the charge of Percy during the tender years of childhood, made me resolve to write and claim him.

With this intention, I rose and opened my blotting-book How to begin was the first puzzle, how to address the husband who had cast me off. Before the question was decided in my mind, the pen had mechanically traced the old form, "Dearest Herbert." And it was so true, I would not efface it, though I expected it to be read with an impatient "Pshaw!" What to say next? My heart throbbed violently, and unfamiliar sounds were in my ear. I could not express myself as I wished. I meant to indite a calm, dignified letter, merely requesting the charge of my little boy; but instead, reproaches for his indifference, mingled with self-upbraidings and promises of undying affection, flowed from my pen. It was a sad jumble, I did not understand it myself; but feeling that I could not do better, and that every minute even this unconnected style became more difficult, I added a demand for the restoration of Percy which my haste to conclude rendered abrupt and peremptory, signed my name, folded the letter, and then rang the bell. West quickly made her appearance, followed by Mrs. Watson, whom, being more active, she had outstripped; with an aggrieved

and resolute manner she entered, which plainly said that she was my proper attendant, and would maintain her rights. By this time I was careless who served me. I was shivering, and asked for a fire.

"Take this downstairs, and send it at once to the post," said I, addressing Mrs. Watson, and giving her the letter in such a way that West could not see the address. Oh! the littleness of our nature. Even in the midst of sickness and pain my pride ruled, and took alarm lest West, seeing to whom it was addressed, should record below that I was asking pardon.

"Dear! dear! your hand is burning—you are quite feverish," exclaimed Mrs. Watson, for in the transmission of the letter our hands had touched. "I think you had better see a doctor, ma'am. You are certainly feverish."

"No, no; it is a cold, caught last night by standing at an open window to watch the moonlight on the sea, after getting out of a warm bed. Nothing but a cold. You shall bring me some tea, and I will go to bed. Post the letter."

All this I perfectly remember; also tasting the tea and refusing to drink it. Something, too, about declining attendance during the night, ordering away all light, forbidding any one to disturb me till I rang, and recommending them to allow no noise in the house.

To this last injunction I thought them especially disobedient, for unaccountable sounds went on until late into the night, sometimes proceeding from Herbert's room, sometimes from my own; a great bustle, an opening and shutting of drawers, as of some one packing up in haste. Once or twice I called out and entreated for quiet, but all in vain. I would have risen to urge my request, or repeat the command in person; but, on making the attempt, found my head held down upon the pillow by some invisible agency. So the packing and the bustle went on, I listening all the while so intently that I seemed to know the very drawer from which the sound proceeded, and could almost guess

what article was being consigned to the portmanteau. One thing more especially distressed me—the process never ended, the same thing over and over again, the same drawer perpetually opened and shut. I could not make it out at all; I could not understand what was going on, except that shreds of my life were being rent away as each fresh article was deposited. The noise ceased at last, and then came a long blank, succeeded by dreams from which I remember the awaking.

A pinkish light was falling across a distant part of the chamber, and behind the curtains, drawn on one side of my bed, so as to protect me from the window, I heard whispering—voices that were not unfamiliar, though the words at first sounded mysterious.

"No, no; be sure there was no meaning in it all. Why, bless you, lady, people say all sorts of things when they are delirious; and, sure, they speak often against those they love the best."

"I hope you are right," answered another; "it seems to me a monstrous sin to be jealous of your own child, to be willing to sacrifice the little life, which is a part of your own, on the altar of your own passions."

At once I recognised the speakers: the first, Mrs. Watson, and the other Julie, who, in spite of my prohibition, had been permitted to attend my sick-bed, the last person to whom I would willingly bare my heart either in its sorrows or its faults. Her pity, did she wish to offer it, would be as the unwary touch on a sensitive plant; one would instinctively shrink, and coil the feelings inwards. She had been my nurse, the receiver of all the fragments of my broken reason and unconscious ravings, as I gathered from the conversation overheard. I must have been very ill for my mind to have been unhinged. Yes; I had been jealous of Percy. Julie was right—it was a monstrous sin, but was I not already punished? What was Herbert more to me? what was anything to me now, so sick, so helpless, and so abandoned?

The remembrance of Julie's hardness frightened me, and, in my feebleness, I thought for a moment of calling her to my side and beseeching her to have some compassion and to spare me. Ah me! I could not reason—only felt too weak to bear more, and was sure that Julie, aware of the depth to which I had sunk, would threaten some further sorrow.

To prevent overhearing more, I slightly moved the curtain; in an instant Mrs. Watson stood within its folds. Pointing behind it, I said reproachfully—"Miss Kenyon."

In answer, she slowly raised the drapery; no one was there.

"I am certain I heard Miss Kenyon speak," persisted I.

"Dear lady, you were so ill, we were all uneasy about you. Miss Kenyon called the day you were so bad while the doctor was here, and hearing that you might be having brain fever, she insisted upon remaining. I told her you forbade my sending for her, as she was rather put out about my not having done so; but she did not mind that; she said she was the proper person to nurse your father's child, and that while life lasted, or until you got better, she would not leave you. So she stayed. Indeed, ma'am, she has been the best of nurses, and has more head than any of us. She has attended you night and day, and managed everything. Without her, I should not have known what to do. Will you see her, ma'am? She is in the next room. We thought it better that she should not appear suddenly before you."

"I can't see her just now; I will presently."

Mrs. Watson dropped the curtain and retired, while I fell into a meditation.

Whatever Julie thought of me, or whatever sharp reproofs in the character of friend she might consider it her duty to heap upon me, one thing was certain, I must not be ungrateful for her devotion. Though uncongenial, because harsh and severe, she was the only friend who had cared to

minister to me in my distress. My heart asked for one whom I could love, and yearned after Lady Mayfort. She had broken with me entirely, and the affection for which I had bartered hers, where was it? Alas! had it not always been imaginary? Had I not set up an idol, and adored it after my own fancy? Partly from the keen disappointment I felt in Lady Mayfort, and partly from a certain degree of indolence, I had never sought a substitute, not reflecting that the lamp of friendship, like other lights which cast their pleasant radiance around us, requires feeding if we expect its warm rays to cheer us when the days are dark and dreary. The fact was, that out of a large circle of acquaintances, I was left with only Julie, and felt now too crushed and spiritless to make any resistance. Whatever she had to say, I must hear. Submitting to the anticipated lectures, because unable to escape them, I closed my eyes with the reflection that I was very weary, that I had no interest in life, and that it mattered little whether my burden was made a trifle heavier or lighter.

When I awoke, the pale grey dawn was giving a cold aspect to the room, quite different from the rich glowing hue on which I last had looked.

"Have I not slept?" I asked of some one sitting near, whose hand rested on the coverlid.

"Yes, dear Una, from sunset to nearly sunrise, a long, sweet sleep, quiet as an infant's. I hope you are better."

"Thanks, Julie," I replied, laying my hand on hers, and this was our mutual recognition; nothing more was said on either side.

She continued to attend me with constant but unobtrusive attention, as if performing an accustomed duty, executing the offices of nurse and attendant with a skill that surprised me. No confidence took place between us; she asked no questions and made no remark on my present situation, only made inquiries respecting my health, the thermometer of which she watched with interest, generally recording some

slight improvement every day. Another good service she rendered me, for which I was more thankful than I ventured to say: she dismissed West on her own responsibility.

My first question, as soon as I was able to sit up, being for letters, a small packet was given me. Hastily seizing it, I turned the letters over and laid them down unopened. There was one from Agnes Osborne, one or two from acquaintances, and some cards of invitation.

"Is there no other?" I asked.

Julie produced one, the very handwriting I expected, and then she discreetly retired to a distance. I tore open the cover, and out fell my own letter, unopened, returned without a word.

I remember a cold chill and Julie rushing to my side, nothing more.

CHAPTER XVI.

BITTER FRUITS.

WILL you see Mr. Slater?" asked Julie one afternoon, a few days after I began to be convalescent. "He called again yesterday, but as you were dozing at the time, I would not allow you to be disturbed. If you would rather not see him to-day, he will come again to-morrow."

Mr. Slater had been something more than my father's man of business; he was his friend, and in conjunction with my brother-in-law, had been appointed trustee to the property especially bequeathed to me. I agreed at once to see him, feeling that he was not only my legal adviser, but most probably a link of communication with my husband, of whom I had heard nothing since the return of my letter.

The emotion I could not master kept me seated as Mr. Slater entered. The crisis of my fate was at hand, and I felt too weak to meet it. Hastening forward to prevent the repetition of my useless effort to rise, he took my hand, inquiring after my health with almost paternal kindness.

"Better, really better," I tried to answer cheerfully; but when he sat down and commenced a few commonplace observations, the little calmness I endeavoured to assume began to waver. Not so does the bearer of good news usually set about discharging his commission.

"You have seen Mr. Elmore lately," observed I, perceiving his reluctance to approach the subject most interesting to me.

Nodding his head affirmatively, he began to fumble in his pockets, first in one, then in another. My breath

laboured heavily as I watched him, for the pain of suspense was becoming intolerable.

Feeling that I could bear it no longer, I suddenly seized his arm, and gasped out, "Tell me the worst! tell me the worst at once!" and fell backwards on the pillows of the sofa.

By the suffering of that moment I became aware that, in spite of all appearances to the contrary, I secretly nourished a hope of reconciliation.

"My dear lady," he began softly—and a world of pity swam in that mild grey eye, harmonising so well with the long, scanty locks which, parted from his brow, hung down a little on either side—"clouds will arise in many domestic histories. Happily they are rarely so dense but that, after a while, sunshine returns with power enough to chase them away. A little patience, dear lady, and we may hope."

The opening was not cheering. Perceiving from my riveted gaze and quivering lip that both had well-nigh failed me, he plunged into business at once.

"I saw Mr. Elmore, by appointment, more than a fortnight ago. Had it not been for your illness I should have made you acquainted with the result immediately."

What could be expected after this preamble? Not much field for the exercise of either penitence or hope. "Tell the worst, and quickly," I repeated, and this time imperatively, biting my lip to conceal its tremor, and pressing my clenched hand against my side with all the force I possessed. Not easily forgotten was the dull pain accompanying each throb, as Mr. Slater delivered his sentence in separate portions.

"Mr. Elmore leaves you in undisturbed possession of the £2,000 a year bequeathed by Mr. Randolph. You have also £600 per annum under the marriage-settlement. As long as you please to occupy this house it is yours; but if you do not care to live in it, the lease and furniture are to be sold."

The last clause was the worst—the breaking up of home, even to the framework, and rendering all prospect of reunion improbable. He had shaken himself free, and was happy. My life was henceforth what I could make it, dependent for its interests on my own resources. The prospect chilled me, yet my quivering heart kept acting a falsehood, and I murmured to myself in a tone which, by its very plaintiveness, refuted my words—" I am wonderfully strong, I shall learn to bear it."

"Where is Mr. Elmore now?" I next asked.

" No longer in England, I believe," was the reply. "He went to Cowes to his yacht the day after I saw him, intending to make a long cruise."

The yacht! how I hated the very name. It had always been a source of vexation to me; I was not unselfish enough to like it because a pleasure to Herbert.

Youth without hope is like a world without a sun. The character of that hope is the measure of the mind. What though it be earthly like mine, to lose it leaves a dreary blank, for it is the motive power of life, impelling, quieting, and sustaining; it beckons on to the goal of the runner, grasps the prize of the conqueror, and is the faithful star breaking through the clouds which threaten to enwrap the traveller with gloom. Ah me! how little of its light was now left to shine upon my solitary path! What was I to do, or to resolve upon? Disappointed at home, Herbert could go forth into the busy world, sure to find many objects to interest and engross him. There are so many spheres for man—but only one for woman, and in that restriction lies her helplessness and weakness in social trials. She has but one platform on which she can safely appear, and if endued with the true instincts given by her Creator, can find no real contentment where there are no affections to lead or to gratify.

Herbert, I knew, would be happy enough; he could do very well without me, but what were to be my plans for

the future? Unable to form any determination, I looked wistfully at Mr. Slater, and asked his advice.

"Go to your sister until the cloud has blown over. Mr. Elmore's anger is too strong to last; he may soften down during his travels."

I was not so sanguine. He had no memories of a sunny home. If to reap what we have sown be an inexorable law, my case was hopeless. I knew of nothing high or noble in my line of conduct, nothing sweet or gentle to plead for me.

"There is another consideration," added Mr. Slater. "With Mr. Elmore's expensive habits he will miss the sum now separated from his income, and, after a time, will probably be willing enough to hold out the olive branch."

Dear old man! he meant to comfort me by putting forward a distant hope of reconciliation, nor was it his fault that his words had the opposite effect. They jarred me at the time, and once, in after years, cast an alloy into the cup —I will not say of happiness, that were too much, but of contentment, which otherwise circumstances would have put into my hand.

"I will take your advice—I will go to my sister," said I, after a little reflection.

"That is well—the best thing to do. Mr. Elmore himself thought so," said Mr. Slater.

"Did he recommend it?" asked I, eagerly, catching at the slighest thread betokening interest on his part.

"Not exactly; he only acknowledged the suitability of such a step, when I insisted upon putting it before him."

Chilled again, I turned to the idea already revolving in my mind. "I know, Mr. Slater, that you are my friend, and will do the best you can for me," I began, with as much calmness as I could muster. "I wish a request to be made to Mr. Elmore to restore me Percy. Will you undertake the commission? Let that request be made in gentle language, but also let him know that I intend to have him

back. If Mr. Elmore refuses, let the law take its course: I believe it upholds the mother's claim while the child is of tender age."

"My dear lady," commenced Mr. Slater, with an uneasy, pitying look, which made me fear that something unpleasant was to follow; "you are right in regarding me as a friend; I only wish it were in my power to serve you better. I have already spoken to Mr. Elmore on the subject, and said as much as he will hear; but he will not give way an inch, nor listen to any arguments. It is better to let a will so determined exhaust itself; no other course will answer. After a time he may be less inflexible. The law, my dear lady, can do nothing; it gives no rights to the mother. Sometimes, in cases similar to yours, the children during early childhood are given into the mother's charge by arrangement, but she has no legal claim."

"Is there then no law in my favour? Have I no power, no authority over my own child—no voice in his bringing up?"

"Not legally," said Mr. Slater.

All my schemes fell to the ground, and I could but sigh over my helplessness.

"Law is not always justice, or we should not have so much work for the lawyers," observed Mr. Slater. "If I may be permitted to advise, I should say—avoid every approach to opposition, and endeavour to acquiesce in Mr. Elmore's arrangements for the present. Withdraw from London, where you are not likely to find either pleasure or interest, and go into Lancashire as soon as you are able to make the journey. The season being at its height, your presence here will only serve to make your affairs a more frequent subject of debate. Not only will you be happier with Mrs. Pinnoch, but you will be putting yourself in harmony with your husband's opinion."

"But, if I understand you rightly, it was wrenched from him—he did not give it," said I.

"True; but he agreed in the conclusion that you could not do better. It may hereafter be some help to your cause, that your mode of life has his approbation."

Mr. Slater's advice was good; my judgment approved, though my heart rejected it—at least, so far as regarded acquiescence in the absence of Percy. However, I could do nothing; the rights of the mother, as I termed my natural desires, went down before the power vested in the father. It was his will to place Percy with Lady Elmore. Hard as it was, if Mr. Slater could only counsel submission, I had no other course, for no other acting in my behalf would have weight enough with my husband to combat his determination with a better chance of success.

Before he left me, it was arranged that I should go to Ellen, who, already apprised of my illness through Julie, had forestalled our wishes by an invitation to join her, she being too delicate to come to me.

On my departure, Mr. Slater and Julie were to break up the establishment and dismiss the servants, with the exception of Mrs. Watson, and whomsoever she required to assist her in taking charge of the house. Before this could be carried out I was again laid up with illness, and now of so serious a character as to create apprehension for my life. My proud spirit was completely broken. No longer shrinking from Julie's pity, I freely talked to her about my faults, my anguish, and my wishes. A craving, an ardent longing came over me, that Herbert might hear of my illness. He had always been kind under any pressure of that sort, though it must be owned that, having generally enjoyed good health, he had not often been tried. Now, in my depression, I wished my sickness might be unto death, if it called him again to my side, or brought a few kind words to my ear. In utter hopelessness of other means of reconciliation, I was prepared to welcome any pain, any trial, that might elicit a manifestation of some regard. Weak and crushed, I thought the end must be near. Would he view

my faults with more indulgence when I was gone? Would he forgive them? Oh! would he, when no fear of their repetition remained to cast a shadow over the present, regret, though but for a brief space, the wife who if she "had loved unwisely had loved too well"? Softened by weakness, my reflections were all unfavourable to myself, and more than just to him. How I magnified every gentle expression I could recollect having received from him! and how bitter I was against myself, ardently longing to cast my repentance at his feet!

Under the influence of these emotions I one morning summoned Julie to my bedside, and said, "I think I am very ill."

"You are better than you were," she answered; "you are out of danger now."

My hope of seeing Herbert was gone, for, except in an extreme case, I had not courage to summon him.

"I don't know whether to be glad or sorry. Perhaps, were I dangerously ill, my husband would come and see me," said I, looking wistfully in her face for confirmation of the hope.

"We did send for him. Mr. Slater went himself, both to Cowes and the Beeches.

My heart stood still as Julie thus replied. "Then he refused to come?" articulated I, with difficulty.

"Not so," returned Julie. "The *Ariel* left Cowes more than a fortnight ago. Lady Elmore believed him to be cruising in the Mediterranean, but did not know for certain, nor did she expect to hear from him. He will not return to England till late in the autumn."

I breathed again. The facts were not so hard as my fears, inasmuch as he had not refused to see me; but the indefinite time of absence confirmed the isolation.

"And Percy?" said I.

"Was quite well, and sent mamma a kiss."

Poor little fellow! it was something that he remembered

me; to miss me was not probable, as I was seldom with him.

All hope of any change in the plan of life sketched out for me was over. I was daily gaining strength, and Herbert was far away, with his heart closed against me and not likely to be opened by any pleasing memories of the past. There had not been on my part the devotion of a wife, and on his no tenderness. Whatever illusions had struggled on against so much accumulated improbability, they must fade now.

Arrangements were fast progressing for my removal to the north. Ellen's home and her affection invited me, and Mr. Pinnoch was coming to fetch me as soon as I was reported to be well enough to travel.

Let me not weary with my morbidness. I was so weak, so faint-hearted, that I found a sickly consolation in the hope that, though separated this side the grave, the day would come when I should rest by Herbert's side. Perhaps, only perhaps, was the rapid thought. Recklessly, and without consideration of its solemnity, I had wished for death. The wish dictated by human impatience might be granted in a moment, and then my place might be—most probably would be—filled by another, dearer and worthier. Thus—oh, bitter thought!—in death, as in life, I should be parted from him for ever!

CHAPTER XVII.

THE CONTRAST.

BROOKE HALL, whether viewed with regard to situation or to the improvements made by the hand of art, was a comfortable and handsome residence. Neither money nor taste had been spared to make it so, for in this mercantile age the two are easily combined. Mr. Pinnoch took more interest in the well-being and well-doing of his tenants than in the luxury of his home. The gay colouring of his parterres or the stately growth of his timber, were points of secondary consideration. Of an active turn of mind, and early accustomed to occupation, on purchasing Brooke Hall he became his own steward, overlooking the estate himself, and the people on it. Every well-intentioned cottager had a friend in him; indeed, all had, both good and bad, he being only severe against idleness, and that with a view to its correction. He built schools, and superintended their management in connection with Ellen and the two girls—principally the latter when I arrived at the Hall, Ellen not being in her usual state of health.

Emma and Maria still had a resident governess, though school routine was much relaxed. They were being trained to apply their education and strengthen their principles by making themselves useful, and were accomplished, sensible girls, such as might have drawn forth a degree of approbation, even from the fastidious Mr. Norris, had he made their acquaintance. At first, I kept myself too much aloof to know much of them. I was sick and morbid, continually fretting, and regarded all practical duties as too stern to

allure me from the contemplation of my own affairs; nay, the cheerful exactitude shown by my nieces in carrying out their parents' projects for the benefit of others, wearied and angered me. Nor could I in any way sympathise with their keen relish for country life. Like many a town-bred woman, I could utter a few rhapsodical exclamations to a good auditor about the air being pure and vivifying, and laden with delicious fragrance; I could talk of the fanning breeze, the limpid water and the purling stream, and string together a few sentences of a similar vocabulary; but a true appreciation was then wanting. Garden-flower and forest-tree, the varied lines and pencilled forms, as well as the beauties of light and shade, had for me only a superficial interest. With Mr. Norris, or any intellectual companion who interested me, I could summon sufficient romance to discourse on the elegance of the fern or the grandeur of the oak, the softness of the moss or the veined variety of the different leaves; but all this was words only, I did not really care, nor could I understand the deep, impassioned admiration they awoke in others. Unless I could catch some of the enthusiasm of those around me, a country sojourn was not likely to be very lively.

June, in her brilliant glory, had just begun when I arrived in the north. Truth compels the acknowledgment that the long, bright days were very wearisome, though I made some effort to respond to the exertions made for my amusement. English lanes and hedges have a beauty of their own, which one must be very dull, very fastidious not to perceive. Perhaps it was so with me. The admiration expressed by my nieces at every fresh sign of the advance of summer, and their joy over the first appearance of the hawthorn blossoms, was really incomprehensible. Regarding my indifference as a disease to be treated, they were indefatigable in their endeavours to develop tastes which did not exist, and which I took no pains to cultivate. My spirit was weary, my frame was weak; their exuberant enjoyment in

country scenes and village duties was beyond the grasp of my understanding. By no effort could I bring myself to care about the rheumatism of Dame ——, or the better behaviour of her grandchildren; the pence which Widow C—— could or could not collect to send her girls to school; or the number of new-born babies in the parish. Pecuniary help, like many an idle one, I freely offered, and was annoyed as well as surprised when my nieces refused the proffered aid, on the plea that their father did not allow them to indulge in charitable sensations not procured at their own cost. This and much more was new to me, and would have been an enigma to solve, had I not been too self-absorbed to give attention to the subject.

The happiness of the birds when trilling their morning songs came more within the compass of my mind, though the lively notes jarred me by their heartiness, and the plaintive increased my sadness. The cuckoo was my especial aversion; it seemed so insolent in its enjoyment that it irritated me. Suddenly bursting forth into its monotonous note, disturbing both the air and my unprofitable reveries, it appeared to revel in proclaiming its happiness, and so tried my nerves, that one day, with childish pettishness, I wished there were no cuckoos in the world.

"Rather try to imitate them, by opening your heart to pleasurable influences," said Ellen, at whose side I seated myself near the window, which admitted a wave of sweet summer scent. "We must do something ourselves. I do not think that happiness comes by chance to any of us."

How readily she talked of happiness! What chance had I when I could not cease thinking, nor reach the level which should lift me out of the dreary present? My querulous mental murmurings were speedily arrested by hearing her softly repeat—

> "'The lesson of sweet peace I read,
> Rather in all to be resigned than blest.'"

"Why am I not to be happy like others? I have done nothing so very wrong after all," said I, with some asperity.

The peaceful serenity of her home made me hard and bitter. In the heyday of prosperity I had looked down upon her life as uninteresting, and stigmatised it as humdrum; now I was obliged to acknowledge that it possessed attractions which mine had never realised, and that sunshine streamed around the hearth I had once despised. The London world is so different from all others; never perhaps have its pleasures the intrinsic value of those in the country. More dazzling, but not so elevating, they discourse to us of humanity, and the numerous inventions it has made, whether connected with science, taste, ease, or luxury; while the other draws nearer to the Divine, and may raise our thoughts and feelings into a purer atmosphere.

Be that as it may, our two homes could bear no comparison. There was a difference too perceptible for me to ignore—her heart was less earthly and her spirit more purified than mine. Trials for her would always have a refining and strengthening effect, while for me the result was doubtful, if even they had not this for their sharpest sting—that they were fruitless. Never in Ellen's domestic history had she shown the clouded brow, or indulged in the covert sarcasm so familiar to me, by which I deteriorated my own character and produced an irritating effect upon Herbert. I followed the impulse of the moment wherever it might lead me, while she could claim the highest title to be enjoyed on earth. She was a Christian woman, habitually living by faith and love; firm in principle, and yielding in trifles, gentle in deportment, and unselfish in action. Her sweet example arrested my attention, and occasionally raised my envy, but did not reach my heart.

With returning strength I became much the same Una as before, sometimes broken-hearted, sometimes rebellious, but not, alas! a better woman. The old roots were still in the

ground, ready to send forth shoots when the soil was stirred. Submission to circumstances, so wisely counselled by Mr. Slater, was by no means easy to acquire. I grew gloomy and resentful, taking jaundiced views of most things about me. The prominence given to religion in the daily avocations at Brooke Hall angered me. I had no appetite for it, and for a time purposely absented myself from the morning and evening prayers. Restless and murmuring, I would not try to reconcile myself to my lot, nor seek to ameliorate it by the employments and interests I might have created. Sometimes mourning my desolation in bitterness of spirit, sometimes resenting my husband's desertion, I would resolve to steel my heart against every kindly emotion. At others, shocked and ashamed of my selfishness, I wondered that I did not weary and alienate both Mr. Pinnoch and my sister, and, with a touch of penitence, made a few weak attempts to please them. Yet, notwithstanding a goodness and thoughtfulness impossible not to appreciate, I was unable to content myself in their home. The world in one sense I could not be said to love; since my alienation from Lady Mayfort, it had brought me no deep pleasure or true satisfaction, yet I longed to return to it, and chafed at being excluded from it.

The summer passed away, and the glorious autumn was on the wane. Its golden honours had for the most part perished; dry leaves rustled in the wind or strewed the ground, notwithstanding the daily labours of the gardener to remove them. The trees moaned and groaned as they tossed their branches in the air, and the mists hung over the landscape. Altogether I thought it very dismal. The leaden sky is truly everywhere, but we do not notice it so much when the mind is occupied. Contrast also helped to make it more cheerless. November was the period when, in continuation of the habits of my father, we usually returned to our sumptuous home. The question naturally arose—Where was Herbert? Not a word of his movements

had reached me, and, do what I would, I could not banish him from my thoughts.

Brooke Hall was becoming insupportably dull, and I was pining to resume my London life—at least I thought so. Once there, it was more than probable that in my fluctuating state of mind and temper, I should soon wish myself back into quietude.

"I must go away somewhere, I cannot reconcile myself to be unhappy," said I one morning to Ellen, as we sat together.

"No, dear Una," she answered with a smile; "no one this side of St. George's Channel would ask it of you. It will be more human to resist grief than to reconcile yourself to it."

"I cannot resist it. A heavy weight oppresses me by night and by day; my heart is always empty and always craving. I wish I had never been born!"

"O Una!" said Ellen, reproachfully, "you grieve me very much. I may not pass through my hour of trial, and to leave you so hopeless as you are will be an additional pang. Could I look to you to take my place and be a Christian mother to my children, very much of my anxiety would be diminished."

Her health being unusually delicate, my sister was anticipating a great sorrow in her own home, and one which could not be alleviated by any prospect connected with myself. If her fears were realised, no one I knew could be better prepared. To live or die she was equally ready, equally submissive; those she would leave behind were not equally willing to lose her.

"Aunt Una would indeed be a failure after you," I answered, judging myself so far correctly as unfitted for serious duty in every calling in life.

"If I am taken, will you endeavour to continue my instructions to my girls—will you teach them never to forget their responsibilities—that life is not meant to resemble

either a pleasure-garden or a wilderness—that their watch-words should be, Pray and labour, watch and wait, and also that their trials, if borne aright, may become the handmaids of happiness? Tell them that, dear Una, both by precept and example."

Her mild eyes glistening with feeling, gave emphasis to the lesson intended chiefly for me. The spell of her placid spirit was on me, taming my impetuous temper into reflection; yet I could not help objecting to the notion of happiness being the result of sorrow.

"Your lot is all sunshine—all happiness," I said, for envy was at work.

"Outwardly perhaps," returned Ellen. "Both outwardly and inwardly I have cause for deep thankfulness, but be assured, my dear Una, that no life is entirely free from trouble. Every Christian heart has sorrow to carry to its Lord. We all have some burden we cannot bear alone—some grief for which we must seek the aid of Him who calls Himself 'the God of all comfort.' You may not think it now, but the experience of the Apostle is a bitter distress to many, 'When I would do good evil is present with me.'"

It was not in me to understand a sorrow like this, genuine and true as it was, conceived by Ellen. I could only regard her in silent surprise and with painful emotion, as when she had finished speaking she lay back on the sofa and closed her eyes, exhausted by the expression of her own feelings. A bright crimson flush lingered on her cheek, deepening the beauty of her now transparent complexion. Her increasing delicacy was a source of uneasiness to us all, especially to her husband, who, in his homely way, loved and cherished her as his best earthly possession.

A great and double contrast was before me. The rough and ready devotion Joshua Pinnoch testified in a hundred ways for his sweet unselfish wife on one hand, and on the other my querulous exactings of a man of fashion towards

whom I had been chiefly attracted by external refinement. A wholesome atmosphere surrounded me. The fault was mine if I did not regain my health. However, character interested me then less than events. Mr. Pinnoch was going to town ; some echoes from the world from which I felt banished would probably reach me through him, and with this hope I awaited his return with as much patience as my nature permitted.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RAY OF LIGHT.

HOWEVER much I might desire again to take up my abode in London, any project of the kind was inopportune at present. Brooke Hall having received me when the kindly sympathies of a new home were most needed, I could not quit the hospitable roof while the happiness of its inmates was overshadowed by a threatening cloud. Should Ellen, as we fondly hoped, resume her place in the happy circle of her home, there would be much to tempt me southwards into more stirring life. I had many nominal friends—the prospect of occasional excitement, and, besides, in some of the scenes I might frequent, there was the possibility of meeting my husband. The house in Upper Grosvenor Street was still at my disposal, yet there was an oft-recurring question to settle: Would my income be adequate to the maintenance of the necessary establishment if I resolved upon making the trial? The expediency, as well as the propriety, of the step, I intended to refer to Mr. Slater for decision.

Mr. Pinnoch's return had almost as much interest for me as for Ellen. I had much at stake, and was athirst for news. Though truly the house-band, as man should be, keeping together the different sections of the family life, both indoors and out, we had managed very well without him. Ellen had been so quiet that I never supposed her happiness diminished by his absence, until I saw the bright sparkle of her eye as his burly form appeared in the doorway.

"My dear old woman, how are you?" was his greeting, in a voice and accent widely differing from the polished tones to which my ear was accustomed, while with awkward gait he stalked towards her couch and folded her to his heart.

The sight of his genuine though blunt affection often caused me a spasm of pain, and was not the least of my daily trials: enforcing the now useless lesson that outward refinement and external advantages were really inferior to sterling worth. They were as the perishable gilding to solid gold—fair and pleasing to the eye, but unable to resist an adverse blow, or the natural wear and tear of social life, without damage to their attractions.

"Where is my husband? What have you heard about him?" asked I, when my turn came to be noticed.

"Mr. Elmore is not in England, nor does Mr. Slater hear of any intention on his part to return at present. Mr. Elmore was on the Nile when he last heard of him, with Sir John Tredegar and another friend, whose name I do not recollect. But his own lawyers are better acquainted with his movements than Mr. Slater, who has received only one direct communication from him. Most probably your husband will spend the winter in Egypt. You must pass yours with us, Una," he added, in a kindly voice, which contrasted in a marked manner with the displeased, almost contemptuous, tone in which he had before been speaking.

"Thank you," I answered, mechanically, for my thoughts were far away, forgetful of the gratitude I ought to feel for the kindness I was receiving; although, fretful and moody as I was, my presence was not calculated to lessen the cares and anxieties of the household.

Mr. Pinnoch continued to pace up and down the room, his hands deeply dived into his pockets, and his face unusually grave. Something annoyed him, but that ought not to surprise me. He was a man of business, with many interests afloat, any one of which, temporarily deranged,

might cast a shade over the brow of a worried man. I tried to think that his visible vexation proceeded from some cause of the kind, the failure of a pet scheme, or the diminished value of some favourite stock; yet, fear of coming evil, like a gaunt spectre, disturbed my mind. The two following days found him often closeted with Ellen. Having free access, I was continually in and out of the room, and could not fail to remark that, on more than one occasion, a conversation, evidently earnest, stopped abruptly at my entrance. Whatever the subject under discussion might be, it was kept between themselves, Joshua being only communicative when he pleased, and Ellen I did not think it right to question. The explanation soon came.

The third morning after his return, Mr. Pinnoch handed me a letter from Mr. Slater, saying, "I thought you might prefer reading this alone."

At a glance I saw and appreciated his kind forethought. Knowing the contents of the letter to be of a painful nature, he wished to spare me the trial of reading it in the presence of his girls and their governess. Kind Joshua! How little would one look for such delicate solicitude from a man of his plain and unpretending character, yet below a surface somewhat rough, flowed a deep current of tenderness, and of that genuine refinement which divines and shelters from injury the feelings of others.

As soon as within the sanctity of my room, I tore open the letter, and having mastered the contents as well as my throbbing brain permitted, I rushed to Ellen. She was just dressed. "You know something about this?" said I, holding up the letter.

"Of the subject-matter, perhaps," she answered, taking it from my hand, as I turned away to avoid being subdued by the pity glistening in her eye. I wished to nerve myself into stoical endurance of the hard lot appointed me. The letter she now read ran as follows:—

"DEAR MRS. ELMORE,

"Had I not seen Mr. Pinnoch in town, I should have paid you a visit instead of writing. Surrounded as you are by kind, efficient friends, capable of giving any advice you may require, there only devolves upon me the duty of apprising you of the instructions I have received. Mr. Elmore takes it for granted that you have no desire to occupy the house in Upper Grosvenor Street, and has given directions to sell the lease and furniture as soon as possible. I need not trouble you with details, as you must know I am bound to execute his orders. In so doing, I shall not, I think, throw any perplexing element into your arrangements, as your advisers could not counsel you to reside in the town house, so far away from your family. Authorised by the firm who share with me the task of carrying out Mr. Elmore's wishes, I write to ask what particular articles of taste or furniture you would like reserved, and if such, when specified, are to be sent to Brooke Hall. All domestic matters having been put in order when you left London, the actual-winding up gives little trouble. Mrs. Watson retires upon her annuity, and those who have remained with her in charge of the house will have their claims fully satisfied. I wait your answer. It is unnecessary to say that your wishes will receive my particular attention. Before long I may have the pleasure of seeing you, Mr. Pinnoch having kindly asked me to pay him a visit. I shall endeavour to get a short run into the country at Christmas; Miss Kenyon would, I think, do the same, if invited.

"Yours faithfully,

"E. SLATER."

"What shall we say about Julie?" asked Ellen, as she returned the letter. It was most easy to refer to the least important part.

"Do not think me unkind, but I would rather not have Julie here," was my reply. Neither her wish to come, nor the recollection of her personal attentions, could influence me, so great was my dread of the severity of her principles.

"As you like, dear," returned Ellen; "our principal wish is to make the Hall pleasant to you."

Neither was I willing to see Mr. Slater, but did not like to say so. At my request Mr. Pinnoch undertook to communicate with Mr. Slater, and convey my wishes, which were few and simple. Declining to avail myself of the offer made, having no desire for any special memento of my brief, I may also say, often stormy, life in Grosvenor Street, I requested that my personal property, yet left behind,

should be forwarded to Brooke Hall, and in a few days, when I had grown calmer, I wrote more explicitly to Mrs. Watson myself.

Thus closed for ever my connection with this luxurious residence, which, however painfully intermixed with other recollections, had the sacred associations of a loving child with a parent's home. Death had wrought the first separation, and from the inevitable character of the event, had produced a certain degree of submission; the second had so many sides from which it could be viewed, that my mind was never long steadfast to one.

About this time my sister's severe illness, following the birth of her baby, forced me out of myself by bringing into stronger relief the anxieties of others. Sorrow in its most distressing form had entered the dwelling of this hitherto happy family. The word came to prepare for the worst, and overwhelmed us all with grief. There was no murmuring, but much prayer. Joshua, sad yet patient, wandered about the house more like a restless spirit banished from its abode than his own energetic self. And so the days passed on with waiting and watching, their course marked with fears which we expected shortly to pass into wailings. There was a pause in the illness, and then, softly and gently as the first streak of dawn, came one morning a glimmer of light into our midst: Ellen appeared a little better. The favourable symptoms continued, and we began to ask if it were possible for her to be restored to us. The fluttering emotion soon deepened into hope, and hope into joy. The destroying angel was bid to stay his hand, and the beloved wife and mother permitted to turn back from the very gates of death, and once more to take her place in the family circle.

Christmas was a merry time at Brooke Hall. Three boys home from school added considerably to its animation. Ellen, now recovered, was able to take her part with Emma and Maria in planning for the general amusement. With Aunt Una it went hard to keep up an appearance of

tolerable composure; yet, not till the merry circle was formed around the fire after dinner, and the young people commenced their tales of mirth and schoolboy fun, did I altogether break down. My lone spirit could bear it no longer; I felt a stranger, too sad and too cold to take any part in the joy brightening this happy fireside. Their laughter was discord, and its echoes smote on my heart so painfully that, unable to restrain my feelings, and unwilling to chill the general enjoyment, I hoped to quit the room without attracting attention.

"Aunt Una, don't go away; I want you," a little one cried after me, as I sought to make my escape. I reached the door, but a sob of irrepressible suffering broke from me ere I could close it.

Where was my child, the sweetest object of my heart's affections now remaining? My husband had cast me off, and I had no plea to urge in opposition. But my little one! it seemed very hard to be deprived of him for a fault which I regretted almost as soon as committed. Pacing my room in a paroxysm of feeling, I was first angry at the cruel exercise of power, and then sad with an infinite despair.

When Ellen visited me, about an hour afterwards, she found me in bed. Instead of responding to her caresses, I buried my face in the pillows. She was a happy wife and mother, loving and beloved, the personification of that happiness for which my heart ached with a terrible earnestness, and I could not bear to look upon her.

"Try not to give way, dear Una," she said, endeavouring to soothe me.

"I am so wretched; I wish I were dead!" exclaimed I, fretfully, withdrawing from her kindly touch. Smarting as I was, the gentlest pressure of the hand intended to testify sympathy was more than I could bear.

"And afterwards," said Ellen, solemnly; "what then?"

"Ah! what then!" I repeated, and turned away my face,

chilled and despairing. There was a volume in those two words.

"Are you sure you would be happier than you are now?" pursued Ellen.

Alas! to that important question there was no answer which could bring me comfort. I knew that rest in the grave was ideal, that to each the grave was but the passage into the great future which would know no change. The thought oppressed me; my heart stood still and ceased its murmurings. I had spoken rebelliously—the fractious mutterings of an undisciplined spirit. Something far different was requisite ere I could find the peace I longed for. The influence of one mind upon another, that subtle power we all exercise, consciously or unconsciously, had been at work. Though far from possessing my sister's principles, I admired them; also her undisturbed calmness at the prospect of being called away from so much that made life dear, made a deep impression, and by connecting it with her Christian profession, led me to attach more reality to religion.

Ashamed, too, of my ungrateful return for her unwearied kindness, I threw myself on her shoulder and sobbed out, "Bear with me, dearest Ellen, for I am very weak as well as miserable; I cannot mourn the less because I know I mourn in vain; but I will try and not grieve you by fretting so much."

Instead of answering, she knelt down and offered a few words of prayer, asking that these trials of mine, so sore and hard to endure, might all work together for my good, that my will might be brought into subjection to the Divine will, and that in God's good time I might be filled with His peace.

Her own sweet face, beautiful in its serenity, enforced the principles she sought to instil. When she quitted me I was a little comforted, and while left to my own meditations, stammered out many a petition for myself.

From that day forward I never completely broke down, and often struggled successfully with myself. Lassitude of frame as well as apathy of spirit had to be frequently resisted, and caused many a conflict. From one cause and another, my constitution, once so good, became weakly, sometimes giving my sister much solicitude.

The boys' holidays were nearly over. One morning, several letters being laid before Mr. Pinnoch, Johnnie—quick, and it must be owned, meddlesome as usual—before his father could distribute them, snatched one from the packet, shouting, "A foreign letter for Aunt Una!" and tossed it across the table.

The announcement of a foreign letter was well calculated to rouse me from my languor; but when I looked at it, the interest lessened. It was from Madame Duval, my former French governess when at school at Brighton. After a pretty flourish about my *bon cœur* and readiness to oblige—qualities coined for the occasion out of her imagination, on that principle of political economy by which the want produces the supply—she proceeded to inquire if, among my large circle of acquaintance, I could procure her a situation. She had just terminated an engagement as chaperon and companion to a young English widow, who for some months had been travelling abroad, and she was now desirous of meeting with another in the same capacity. Though far from deserving her commendation, I would willingly have assisted her had it been in my power. She was a kind-hearted, unsophisticated woman, and particularly ladylike.

"A year ago I might have done something for her, but now it is quite out of my power," said I, addressing Ellen, as I gave her the letter to read.

An animated flush rose to my sister's cheek as she perused it, and she laid it down with a bright expression of countenance, which later in the day was explained to me.

"Has it occurred to you to secure Madame Duval as a companion for yourself?" asked Ellen, sitting down beside me.

Doubtful of her meaning, I looked up quickly from the tapestry-work with which I was endeavouring to beguile my thoughts and time. Divining my wish to leave the Hall, was she about to propose a separate establishment?

"You are losing all your colour, and much of your strength," she resumed. "Change of scene is sometimes an excellent medicine. Two or three months abroad are likely to benefit you. What do you say to making the experiment with Madame Duval?"

As she made the proposition, the hot blood rushed to my cheek and brow, and my heart actually leaped with joy. That would be a break in the dull monotony I found so trying, a stirring of the stagnant life into which I had fallen. Yet I hesitated. Mr. Slater's expressed desire for me to continue a residence, which had Mr. Elmore's approbation, restrained me.

Ellen, believing a change necessary, urged me to make the experiment, and pressed for my decision, adding, "Joshua and I think it would be an excellent arrangement for a short time. Your health has really suffered; when that is restored you will have more energy. You need a little change."

"Very true, but—but——"

"But what?" asked Ellen.

"What will Mr. Slater say?" I was afraid that the change was offered me in a questionable shape.

"Joshua thinks he will take the same view as we do. You only leave us for a short time, and with an unexceptionable companion."

The temptation was strong. I longed for change with a great longing—craved for something to interrupt the same round of thought—the daily conflict between duty and inclination, the desire to brood over the weight of my burden, or to take it up. Madame Duval was a lady, well-born, and somewhat attached to me. Her companionship in the manner proposed was a pleasant suggestion, yet I saw difficulties.

"And Percy," I observed; "can I go away and leave him behind?"

"For a short time you may, easily. Mr. Elmore is not expected home before the end of the spring. As soon as he returns, Joshua and Mr. Slater hope to persuade him to allow Percy to live with you. After the change proposed, you may be stronger altogether, better able to take a practical view of your position, and fitted in every way for the discharge of your maternal duties, and then, according as your feelings or judgment may direct, you can either continue to reside with us, or settle in the neighbourhood. Travelling," continued Ellen, with a smile, "is now the universal panacea; the physician's stereotyped prescription for almost all maladies."

More than willing to be persuaded, I yet wished Mr. Slater to be consulted, and waited his reply with some anxiety. The slumbering waters had been stirred into movement, and would not easily subside. The more I dwelt upon the new idea the more I was convinced of its advisability, feeling that extraneous pressure alone would effectually rouse me to continuous exertion, and give me a chance of exhibiting any dignity of character.

Mr. Slater's letter came, containing his full approval of the scheme, and the offer of a respectable man, long known to him, who would faithfully serve me as attendant and courier. Lady Elmore's opinion was not asked, I having resolved to hold no communication with her under existing circumstances.

And so it happened that one bright frosty morning early in February, I found myself on board a steamer, with maid and courier, contemplating the receding shores of Old England with a sensation of pleasure to which I had long been a stranger. Intelligence for a time prevailing over sentiment, I had already prepared myself to be interested as well as diverted.

CHAPTER XIX.

CHANGE OF SCENE.

ENJOYMENT is relative, varying not only in degree but in the object, according to the idiosyncrasy of the individual. A boy, half blind with chronic rheumatism in the eyes, was heard to apply the term beautiful to a dull, gloomy day. He spoke as he felt; the bright sunshine so cheering to others was pain to him, while his aching nerves were soothed by the sombre hue which depressed his neighbours. A difference in the estimation of what constituted enjoyment had come to me. In the yachting days at Cowes I could never have believed it possible for me to stand on a steamer's deck without reluctance, yet here I was, of my own free will, and happier than I had been for many months. The traveller's spell was on me, stimulating me to watch with interest our approach to the tall, white-looking houses that challenge the attention as you enter the harbour of Boulogne. The effect upon the hitherto quiet passengers was not without its result.

As the boat neared the quay there was a general bustle; several partially recumbent figures started into active life; loose wrappers were speedily converted into portable rolls, and all pressed towards the gangway. Then came the inevitable passage between two ropes, about three feet apart, with a hedge of spectators on either side, and a din of indistinguishable sounds from numerous touters, who, shouting into the ears of the sick, weary passengers the names of their different hotels, endeavoured to thrust cards of recommendation into their unwilling and fully occupied

hands. François preceding to make way, and my maid Watson, the niece of our late housekeeper, following, I was soon safely steered through the crowd, and conducted to the Hotel des Bains, where Madame Duval, already installed, welcomed me with characteristic volubility.

Every one, in these days, has travelled. Who will care for a traveller's story, especially where the scene lies so near home? Sympathisers may perhaps be found with the dreary impression made by a foreign hotel when seen for the first time. The gloomy grandeur of the venerable furniture, which a plentiful amount of lacquer and gilding fails to render cheerful, can suggest no thought of home, but its absence. Well, I was in quest of change, and must not murmur that it was complete. A number of fine-looking women were standing about near the window, some knitting, others lounging, waiting to earn a few pence by carrying a parcel or carpet-bag; most of them with neat white caps and long gold earrings, very pretty and very becoming, contrasting curiously with their scanty petticoats, which were so short as to make a goodly display of dark blue stockings and rough wooden sabots. Madame Duval spoke of them as *criardes*—a name, judging from a scene I witnessed on the pier before the close of the day, peculiarly appropriate.

As we strolled along, two of these women more particularly arrested my attention. In the white heat of passion they were loading each other with abuse, and bandied the hard words to and fro with such frantic energy that we expected them each moment to come to blows. The elder and more voluble speaker paused at last, her vocabulary being fairly exhausted, and now the other, seizing her chance, stretched out her arms, shook her clenched fists at her opponent, and hurled forth her fiercest accusations, culminating in theft and sacrilege, "Vous, vous voleriez jusqu' à l'antel!"—(you would even steal from the altar.) No answer was returned, for just then an officer of the Customs

arrived on the scene. Leaving his little boat at the side, he sprang up the steps to the pier, and, raising his hat with the easy grace peculiar to a Frenchman, addressed the viragoes with a polite, "Bonjour, mesdames," which stayed their wrath like magic. The storm was instantly hushed. The two belligerents eyed him in surprised silence for about half a second, when the elder fury returned his salutation with a smile, and the weaker marched off triumphant. Unexpectedly she had given the last word and thrown the heaviest stone!

An incident similar, yet different, I heard related by an English country magistrate, which brings out the two nationalities so well, that I am tempted to repeat it. In his speak-a-word room—where he was accustomed to hear and settle the disputes of the poorer villagers, and notably those of his own tenants—two women once presented themselves to complain of a savage attack which each had made upon the other. The first speaker accusing her neighbour of having torn out her hair by the roots, in confirmation of the barbarity offered her head for inspection. Before he had time to decline the ocular testimony otherwise than by an involuntary step backwards, the other innocently came to his rescue, and opening a small basket hanging on her arm, drew from it a cap all tattered and torn, which she asserted the other in her fury had rent in pieces. How the case ended I have no recollection; I only remember my own conclusion on this occasion—that the loud volubility of these *criardes* was preferable, and on the whole more refined—save the mark—than the word-and-a-blow anger of my practical countrywomen.

I was now a wanderer, seeking distraction, and thrown upon my natural intelligence to extract it from the novel circumstances surrounding me. Happily for me, I had been well educated, and was not really frivolous, though the energies of passion and self-will had, for some time past, superseded the culture of my intellect. Glad was I now to take it up and exert myself to draw pleasure from mental

resources. My heart had no home, nor was it likely to find one, let me seek it where I would. Yet, alive to the necessity, I was willing to rouse myself. I had no wish now to sink into lethargic morbidness,—no wish to wither and die like a blighted flower swept down by the storm. On the contrary, I was resolved to exert myself, hoping that some stray gleam from the interchanging lights and shades in scenes where all was new, would occasionally penetrate the gloom which had gathered about me.

That first evening Madame Duval and I sketched out a plan intended to combine recreation and health, little dreaming that each move we made apparently for our pleasure was bringing me nearer some of the most important crises of my life.

Paris I had already visited with my father, and therefore it was left out of our itinerary, except so far as regarded a temporary rest, it being wanting in the principal object of search—freshness. True, in more senses than one. Here, more than in other cities, are the two extremes side by side, riches and squalor, gilding and dirt. Whilst contemplating their finest churches with the pleasure they for the most part inspire, something is often at hand to offend ; a shed, a cobbler's stall thrown out from a corner, or some incongruity equally displeasing to the eye, is present to mar the whole and mingle regret with admiration.

Florence was one of the cities I was most desirous of seeing, and Rome was the goal of my expectations, where all that was great and interesting, grand and moving centred. There I hoped to spend the principal portion of the time passed abroad, feeling that amidst its long chain of historic associations the spirit must be cold indeed which could not be warmed into life. Its sculptures and pictures, above all its old ruins, mellowed by time into more than their original beauty, as is generally the case, appealed to my imagination, and drew me out of the circle in which my world of thought had hitherto revolved.

Naturally, and without effort, I was taken out of myself in the different resting-places selected to break the journey. There was so much to see. The tide of human life rolls on whether it goes ill or well with ourselves; almost imperceptibly strange scenes give rise to new interests, and these weave themselves into the future. Other lands and their customs, other people and their individualities were before me, and could not fail to awaken some interest in so nervous a temperament as mine. The incidents and anomalies we meet with in travelling are often amusing. "La mendicité est interdite" was written up in several places in a town where ordinary beggars abounded, or when mounting a step or two in the social ladder, begging was rife among porters, coachmen, and employés. The first time I heard the latter term directly applied it was addressed by a passenger from a railway-carriage to an official standing near, who had, apparently, no other employment than to warm his hands in his pockets—a misnomer sufficiently amusing, for the employé so called, after slowly advancing and exchanging a few words with the gentleman, took up the same idle position as before.

The rapacity encountered was occasionally laughable. One man, after volunteering the information that the luggage could not be weighed for an hour, held out his hand for remuneration. Occasionally their readiness and good-nature met with a reward. François being teased by a porter for a gratuity considered undeserved, in order to rid himself of the applicant, tendered him the last sous remaining in his pocket, amounting to twopence of our money. Taking them with a touch of the cap, the man held them up to the light, and glancing towards me, said, with perfect politeness, but with a tone of irresistible humour, "Ce n'est pas beaucoup, Monsieur." My suggestion of the addition of a silver piece was the natural consequence; to which François added on his own account a reprimand for begging, neither of which, I fear, was of any real service.

Though Madame Duval, in our establishment in Brighton, had occupied the situation of French governess—it being her especial office to improve us in the French language—she was regarded more as a lady speaking French than as an instructress. Yet associations have a power of their own. Fragments of my school days kept returning to my mind. On approaching Lyons I found myself repeating, as if fresh from a geographical lesson, "Lyons, at the confluence of the Rhone and Saone, famous for the manufacture of silks, velvets, and valuable stuffs." The handsome city, however, surpassed my expectations, these being considerably modified by its revolutionary character. The tall, symmetrically-built houses indicated wealth and taste; nor was the picturesque wanting. The heights of Fourviere, above the Saone, were dotted with villas, and the summits, ornamented by churches, had an imposing effect, raising the thoughts above the money-making pursuits which are said to characterise the Lyonnese. Unlike the generality of their countrymen, they are not pleasure-seekers, but workers; and although the merchants often amass large fortunes, they bring up their sons to trade.

In many respects, Madame Duval was the companion I needed. Not only was she able, by imparting general information, to deepen the interest of the scenes we visited, but being no link to the past, from which I was endeavouring to escape, I was not tempted to talk of myself. A too ready listener sometimes does harm. In the end we may grow stronger for the absence of the sympathy for which we crave. Words often bind to obstinacy, committing us to follow out a scheme or resolution, which otherwise reflection, by softening down strong impressions, might induce us to alter. Could I have freely discussed with her the history of my married life, the chief purport of my travelling would evidently have been frustrated. Instead of deriving pleasure from the novelty in my daily surroundings, I should have been ever making the same profitless round of thought.

I felt very, very bitter against my husband, believing that the blame measured out to me was exaggerated, and confirmed only too plainly the painful suspicion that I had been the victim of his cupidity and my own foolish credulity. With him there never had been—there never could be—that heart union with which ardent, energetic natures, according as circumstances favour or blight, are gifted or afflicted.

Yet at times these mortifying suggestions mastered my mind, and I turned away from what was expected to interest me with sickening indifference. With most women, the heart's exigencies come first; affection rules their life; where that aches or throbs with a heavy burden, earth's fairest, loveliest scenes lose their enchantment, and end in weariness of spirit.

Happily, Madame Duval was often as a shield between me and vexing thoughts. Her presence recalled the days of which mental effort constituted the chief pleasure, and in this ill-fated city I easily fell back upon the interest evoked by historical recollections. Perhaps my sentimentalism was a little fed by visiting the site where so many horrors were once enacted, being young enough for such scenes to exercise over me a stimulating influence. It was a certain satisfaction to visit the Hotel de Ville, where sat the revolutionary tribunal, under those monsters of cruelty, Couthon and Collot d'Herbois, and the square before it, where the guillotine was set up, which did its sanguinary work, till the wretched leaders, afraid of the effect produced on the people by the sight of so much bloodshed, moved their victims out of the town, and had them shot down by platoons of soldiers. The same square brought back the memory of Cinq Mars, youthful and rash, who paid there the forfeit of his life, and bequeathed fruitful materials for the pen of the novelist as well as the historian. Tradition says he was executed for conspiring against his friend and patron, Cardinal Richelieu; but history accuses him of the more tangible, if not more

serious treason, of plotting against Louis XIII. in favour of his brother, Gaston d'Orleans.

So much that we have been taught to consider fact is now called in question, that the study of history is, to say the least, discouraging—to be pursued with caution. One hardly cares to give much time to pages which, like the journal of the modiste, often vary with the advances of the age. We used to believe that Nero was a monster, and the burning of Rome the wanton outrage of a lawless will; but we were entirely wrong. The modern intellect knows better. Nero, according to new investigations, did it from a noble motive, the desire to embellish the city. It is suggested that he destroyed what was bad in order to have an excuse for making improvements without hurting prejudices. Let charity go a step further, and induce us to imagine that his dance to the fiddle while the city was burning, was joy at the prospect of successfully carrying out his good intentions! I do not care much about Nero, but the changes in modern history are perplexing, more especially the whitewashing of some of our sovereigns. Henry VIII. turns out essentially patriotic, and Richard III. a noble character, to whom posterity must go on its knees and beg pardon for having believed the contrary!

Undeterred by any fear of wasting attention on myths or vague tradition, I tried to give my mind to the objects around me, and the tales connected with them. The Great Revolution still retains its hold on popular belief; the mark it made upon men's minds being too deeply cut, and, as yet, too recent to pass into the mythical character it may perchance assume for some future century. Crediting the records of history, I visited the sites of their occurrence, and was often able to make them useful in drawing me out of myself. But perhaps, in days to come, all this may have become fable, and the Lyonnese, now supposed to be turbulent, may appear a quiet, maligned race, entirely given to habits of industry, and innocent of the frequent insubordination attributed to them.

From Lyons we proceeded to Avignon, the interest of the road being chiefly maintained by the hope of some sudden change either of product or temperature, characterising a southern climate. Nothing, however, struck me so much as the clear bright sky, which yet, as in our more sombre land, has many aching hearts beneath it. The verdure of our own country is, I think, more soothing and refreshing on the whole, though novelty ever exercises a certain charm. The olive disappointed me, nor did it so much improve the landscape as the tall, dark cypress, which, growing in clumps here and there, was a rest to the eye. Once or twice I could not refrain from asking myself the question—"Is it true that in life, as in Nature, we may be wearied with sunshine—that happiness, like the day, in order to be harmlessly enjoyed, must be tempered with occasional shadow?" Paley says that those who have never felt intense pain have never known intense pleasure. I will not contest the philosopher's opinion; few would of their own will make the experiment. My own conviction is that, in the daily drama of human experience, blunted sensibilities sustain their part better than the finely edged, and come more successfully out of the mortal strife. They deal more practically with the present, and lose less time and energy in hovering over the past. Whilst the one class mourn the bygone opportunity, not to be restored by the bitterest tears that can be shed, the other often profit by failure and disappointment.

Without adventure we reached Avignon, the city classically dear as the scene of Petrarch's muse, and historically interesting as the residence of the Popes during a period of seventy years, when the anti-Popes, to the standing bewilderment of those who would trace the succession to St. Peter, reigned at Rome. More Italian than French, Avignon, from its mixed associations, has a double interest, and offers many objects for the traveller's admiration. Its large buildings have an air of palatial splendour even in decay;

the walls are gloomy, and the very dust of the streets is eloquent of historic lore. Here many a proud Pontiff kept his state in regal pomp, carrying a brave front to the world, while his spirit inwardly chafed at the long banishment from the home of his predecessors. In the old palace—now converted into a barrack, the ignominious fate of many a lordly edifice in France—we visited the vault where Rienzi was confined. Patriot or demagogue, one could but pity his fate: in the prime of life to be incarcerated under ground for three years, and in the zenith of his ambition to be restricted to a narrow cell. Had he been a great man, misfortune would have elevated his mind and enabled him to bear the true test of character—success. We know that it had no such good effect. On leaving his prison for the tribuneship at Rome, he exercised his power so unworthily that he fell a victim to popular fury, being massacred soon after having resumed the government.

The old Glaciere, a large square tower, so called from an ice-house once in its vicinity, renewed the interest commenced at Lyons relating to the first Revolution. Within its dark recesses perished numerous victims, who were thrown into the deep dungeons half alive, the ruthless work of destruction being completed by a plentiful sprinkling of quicklime. From thence we visited the pleasure-grounds laid out near the Cathedral. They are modern and pretty; but do little towards removing the general sombre impression, though the Durance, shining like a silver thread in the distance, attracts the eye in the direction of Vaucluse, and mingles the loves of romance with the stern memories of history. The streets I found narrow, dirty, and cruelly paved; the stones, as in some of our provincial towns, being carefully placed with the points upwards. Woe to the tender foot, or thin-shod dame whom curiosity tempted to explore them. First travels generally grave strong memories; I really think that the sharp flints of some of these ancient streets will not be among the least enduring.

CHAPTER XX.

RENCONTRES.

ON leaving Avignon, we had scarcely taken our seat in the railway carriage, thankful to have secured half a compartment to ourselves, when my ear was caught by a sweet, silvery voice, asking in Anglo-French the official standing near to open the door. Looking up, I perceived a diminutive person, less than plainly dressed, in a greyish attire, so encumbered with parcels, bags, and wraps of different kinds as to be nearly lost among them. After glancing hopelessly at the guard for help, she thrust the principal part of her encumbrances on the floor, and pushing them before her as she entered, seated herself by my side. There established, she arranged her packages on the vacant seat opposite, counted them carefully, and when satisfied that none were lost, she turned towards me, observing with complacency that it was pleasant to travel with her own countrywomen. Sorrow had brought me low in heart, but not in pride, and that did not draw me towards the strange little figure now appearing to expect my sympathy. On terms of intimacy I had been accustomed to mix only with the wealthy or the exclusive, and the odour of fashion hung about me still.

Wishing to intimate that the pleasure anticipated from my companionship was not likely to be realised, I bowed coldly, and was soon engaged with a book. My new neighbour gave her attention to Madame Duval, who, less taciturn from taste, and without that hauteur of manner so often made our national reproach, willingly responded. An

animated conversation ensued between them, in which the little lady bore the principal part with point and spirit, indicating the possession of mental gifts of no common order.

My book before long failed to occupy my attention. Attracted in spite of myself, I listened first with surprise, then with interest, and soon forgot the loose-fitting gloves with an unoccupied half-inch at the ends of the fingers. The antiquated cut of the garments and the general grotesqueness of her appearance no longer forced themselves upon my observation. The power of intellect prevailing gradually over superficial impressions, I began to regard my new companion in a more favourable light, first as a character, next as a distinguished oddity, and before reaching Marseilles I was irresistibly drawn towards her. The original plainness had entirely disappeared; I only perceived that her eye beamed with intelligence when it did not twinkle with merriment, and willingly acknowledged that her peculiarities were amply compensated. The sweet voice poured out anecdote after anecdote, interspersed with remarks alternately brilliant or shrewd, and showed an intimate acquaintance with men and things, my world not excluded, whose customs and occupations had still a deep hold upon me. I was fairly fascinated.

Madame Duval was a ladylike, not a clever companion. She was cheerful and chatty, but had no solidity of mind, and could infuse no real interest into my inner life.

Mysterious are the links which sometimes bind heart and heart together. This elderly lady, with nothing external to attract a fastidious taste like mine, and from whom I had at first turned with unreasonable aversion, ended by gaining my affection, and afterwards exercised no inconsiderable influence over me and my friends. Her history was not an uncommon one. She had been early married and soon left a widow. Too active and clever to sink into insignificance, she emerged from her mourning a busy, helpful, intelligent woman, with a few idiosyncrasies and a large

heart. At the time of our meeting she was going to Rome, bound, as it appeared to me, on a thankless errand—an endeavour to dissuade a great-niece from forming an engagement with an Italian nobleman. I had only to look into myself to fear for her success. Most girls have great tenacity of purpose when opposed in similar circumstances. They believe too much in impressions, and fancy that a will thwarted in a matter of affection entails misery. Mutual love is very precious, but only reliable when based on solid worth and sound principle.

At the period of which I write, the railway terminating at Marseilles, the rest of the journey to Nice was made by sea or carriage, the former extremely disagreeable, and the latter long and wearisome. Mrs. Ewing experiencing some difficulty in making arrangements, I gladly offered her a seat in my carriage, so strongly was I prepossessed in her favour, notwithstanding our short acquaintance; and thus commenced a regard destined to ripen into a fruitful friendship.

Those who have gone the route from Marseilles to Nice over the Estrelles, before the difficulties were smoothed by a railway, will not easily forget the trials on the road, where the meagre accommodation, bad as it was, contrasted advantageously with the still more insignificant table. The best rooms in more than one hotel had, however, been once occupied by a Pope or by Napoleon—a circumstance which might have increased the reckoning, but did not, I imagine, reconcile the traveller to his indifferent quarters. Sour bread, cold coffee, scarcely any service, and occasionally dilapidated rooms, with doors without fastenings, formed a part of our experience.

A general *couleur de rose* hue is not found in the South except for those who can extract pleasure from contrasts. Our English atmosphere, it is true, cannot be compared with the buoyant air and azure skies of these highly-favoured lands. So long as the eye looks upward, it is

well, but let it fall on the earth below—let it lower its investigations to material life, and the enchantment vanishes. Squalor and dirt meet the gaze at every turn, raising a mournful suspicion of great moral degradation, and yet, it must be allowed, that the picturesque is often blended with the visible wretchedness.

Arrived at Nice, Mrs. Ewing left us in order to proceed to Rome, while we remained to enjoy awhile the sunny clime for which Nice is famed.

I shall not easily forget that last view, as on one of the latter days of February our travelling carriage slowly wound its way up the gradual slopes of the Genoa road. Looking down from the increasing height, the city was basking in sunshine, and offered such novel beauty to my eye that I left it with regret, though almost every turn of the route deepened my newly-kindled interest. The palm and the olive had such an Eastern character that they charmed me, nor must I forget the pleasing effect of the orange-tree, with its rich fruit glistening between the leaves like golden stars.

The Cornice road is more or less interesting all the way. We cannot wonder that the Italians are proud of it. It is of comparatively modern date, having been constructed in 1828 for Charles Felix, whose statue now adorns the entrance of the port at Nice, minus part of the uplifted finger. This was broken off by some of the inhabitants in a fit of resentment at the revoking of some commercial privileges previously accorded. I will not linger on the road, beautiful as it is. Many have seen it for themselves, and those who have not will easily find a better description than I can give. Suffice it that many impressions then made are still fresh, and are gratefully remembered for the good they did me, carrying me away from that home-life which was so darkly overshadowed.

The programme of travel made at Boulogne had hitherto been carried out. We were going to Florence. All had gone smoothly until within a short distance of Pisa, when

the first difficulties presented themselves. Whispers reached us here and there of certain brigands roving about the country, but these reports, when sifted, were usually found to proceed from the chambermaids and waiters of the hotels where we stopped, and were contradicted by higher authority. Madame Duval being extremely timid, sometimes amused, but oftener annoyed me, by asking at every post-station if robbers had been lately heard of. Infected at length by her oft-repeated fears, I could not help putting the same question to the landlord of our hotel at Pisa, whose manner and appearance inspired me with confidence.

"None this year that I have heard of," he answered readily; but Madame Duval, who had a theory of her own that landlords and brigands were leagued together, looking unconvinced, he added, "There is an Englishman in the house, detained by illness. He is going the same journey as yourselves when his companions join him, and may be able to give you better information. Would you like to see him?"

Having no desire to make acquaintance with a stranger, I declined the landlord's civil offer of introduction, and was willing to content myself with such accounts as François could obtain from the sources within his reach. Seriously, I had no real apprehension, only an occasional reflection of it from Madame Duval. Banishing even that, I resolved to profit by the present opportunity and visit the town. The alabaster weights and finished photographs now so common, have done much to make Pisa known to the untravelled. The large space where the Duomo, the Baptistery, and the Leaning Tower all stand within a short distance of each other, is so well represented as to be generally familiar. Under the guidance of François we repaired to this spot, visiting each in succession, the Campanile the last, unfortunately choosing the least agreeable moment for its ascent. The door was no sooner opened than a number of young men, rough-looking and mannerless, rushed past us, scam-

pered one after the other up the narrow staircase, and gained the summit before we had ascended a third of the way. The result was a rapid removal of the wrappers of the bells, and a deafening din not easily to be forgotten. This beautiful tower is composed of eight stories encircled by fluted columns, some of marble, some of granite, and is, as we painfully experienced, a bell tower, where hangs a chime of bells which are rung at stated periods. A fine view when the air is clear, may be enjoyed from the top, if the spectator is happy enough to select a quiet moment; but the terrific clanging which accompanied our visit would have destroyed a paradise. It did not, however, last long. After a vigorous pulling of a few minutes' duration, the bells were again made fast, and our uncouth companions clattered down the stairs with a noise that woke the echoes of the old walls to anything but music.

After a due performance of the travellers' duty, we returned to the hotel, intending to start on the morrow for Florence. A gentleman stood in the passage, muffled above the chin, having something of the appearance of a stranger, and much that of an invalid.

"This must be your countryman," observed Madame Duval in her own language, and immediately reverting to her fears, added, "Can you not inquire of him respecting the safety of the road?" At these words he turned towards me, and so obviously waited to be addressed, that I had no alternative. I used the French language, not being certain of his nationality, though I suspected him to be the Englishman of whom the landlord had spoken, and moreover to have placed himself purposely in our way.

"I have not heard," he answered in pure English, which in that distant land fell very sweetly on my ear. For the accents told of home, of dear ones, of happiness—for a moment only—to be followed by the recollection that these existed not for me—for whom henceforth the beaten track of woman's daily life was out of course!

"I have been ill, and am obliged to wait here until strong enough to continue my journey. In a short time I shall be joined by my companions, and intend to proceed to to Rome—undeterred by any fear of brigands," he added, with emphasis; "there may be other encounters more dangerous."

These last words, offensive in themselves, were said with a smile, which gave an unpleasing effect to his countenance.

By some he might have been considered handsome, as he now stood before us with his mufflers removed. The dark, glossy hair was abundant; the beard rich and well trimmed; and the straight, aquiline nose compensated a little for the low brow and square, massive chin. The eyes were large and glowing, unnaturally so—perhaps from illness, or I should have said they were too staring to be consistent with the manner which, at home or abroad, is characteristic of a gentleman.

"You go from hence to Florence, I presume?" he observed, following up the stairs, having drawn aside for us to precede him. "Do you make any stay there?"

Though unwilling to communicate our intended movements, it was difficult to refuse answering the question provoked by my companion, nor did I like to leave the reply to her, lest timidity should make her indiscreet.

"Our plans and our stay are both uncertain."

Guarded as were my words, I was unprepared for the temerity of his next remark—

"In ten days, or a fortnight at most, I hope to continue my journey to Rome, and shall esteem it one of fortune's favours if our two parties should chance to travel together. We are three, besides servants, and know how to use fire-arms. If bandits attack us, they are likely to have the worst of it."

Again his smile repelled me. Untempted by the prospect of defenders vaguely held out to me, I bowed without speaking, and taking Madame Duval by the arm to prevent

any last words from her helping the stranger to further intimacy, I went into my room and closed the door.

We saw no more of him till the following morning. A carriage engaged to convey us to the railway was early at the door, surrounded as we entered it by a crowd of clamouring beggars trying to out-scream each other, too numerous and vociferous to be tormenting. The scene was simply ludicrous, moving us to laughter rather than charity. By rough and kind words judiciously applied, François succeeded in keeping them at a convenient distance while our shawls and parcels were properly arranged. The carriage ready, and ourselves seated, the landlord advanced to make his bow, accompanied by the inevitable parting speech. We had been requested to inscribe our names in the visitors' book, which I now saw in the hand of the stranger, who stood in the doorway. "Madame Duval and friend, from Boulogne, proceeding to Florence and Rome," had been hastily written: truth as far as it went, but affording no clue for the gratification of curiosity. Unwillingly I caught his eye as we were starting, and a sound something like "a riverderla" floated to my ear. The wish, if such it were, was unreciprocated. An antipathy difficult to explain had sprung up, and was so deep as to influence my conduct afterwards, and save me from a mistake natural enough to one of my sanguine temperament.

If woman's judgment is not always stamped with strength and clearness, and she finds some points too hard for her, she has often a quickness of feeling and justness of perception which do her equal service. Let her beware how she throws away the weapons which nature has put into her hands!

CHAPTER XXI.

A GLEAM OF HOPE.

FLORENCE THE FAIR! And fair it was when the eye rested upon the soft vegetation clothing the hills on either side, where villas ornamented the foreground, and were succeeded higher up by a melting away of houses, like white specks in the distance. Viewed ftom the hotel, a mind so formed as to prefer truth to poetry might have sought some more appropriate designation. Exactly before the window the Arno rolled its brown, muddy waters, bearing swiftly on its bosom a few doubtful objects, unromantically suggestive of its being the receptacle of general rubbish, and even small dead animals. Is the Arno always yellow? More or less, I must conclude. It was so at Pisa; it was so each time that I have visited Florence—a sort of cousin-germain to the Tiber, partaking of the same complexion. But if the beauty, we are accustomed to look for in the slow, majestic river, was wanting, the loss was amply compensated by the hundred treasures of art for which this noble city is so distinguished.

The day after our arrival we drove about under a bright sun, in order to make a general acquaintance with the town. Like myself, Madame Duval had never been in Florence before. She was anxious to visit all the galleries and museums there were to see, while I, not always ready for exertion, was only spasmodically enterprising. One of our first drives was to the church of San Miniato, built on the heights, a little way out of the town, and one of the oldest in Florence, dating from the eleventh century. High walls,

thickly mantled with ivy, gird it round, and the platform on which it stands is now a cemetery for the wealthy of Florence. Very pretty it is, laid out in walks, with the weeping-willow judiciously though sparingly planted, and commanding a fine view of the city which lies below. The whole panorama was so striking that the very trite exclamation, "Oh! la bella Firenze!" came spontaneously from us both.

Hardly had I made it when a voice at my side startled me: "Good morning, Mrs. Elmore." A tall figure, seen indistinctly in the distance, had now joined me, and I beheld my friend, Mr. Norris—Mr. Norris in the outer man, but changed indeed. His manner was stiff, his tone was cold. Obviously he had only spoken from necessity, not wishing to show himself uncourteous, but all customary demonstration of pleasure at the meeting was absent. What had caused this unexpected alteration? Herbert and he were never either very intimate or very friendly; why should he take up his quarrel? Could it be that he was influenced by Lady Elmore, and must I regard his conduct as a sign of being under the ban of all her ladyship's acquaintance? If he, so original, independent, and self-reliant, adopted her sentiments and reflected her opinions, what would be the general impression about the Beeches? Had Lady Elmore evinced less severity of character, I might have appealed to her to intercede for me with her son. A mother's influence will sometimes prevail when all else fails; but, independent of her natural austerity, there was a secret dislike to me, which I had in part merited, never having really tried to conciliate her. I could but feel myself better off without her interference, believing her more likely to harden than to soften him.

"I am surprised to see you here—I thought you were with your family in the north; but probably some of them are with you," said Mr. Norris, glancing at my companion.

"My friend, Madame Duval," I hastened to say, per-

ceiving that an introduction was expected, and added, "I am travelling for my health."

"It needs Mrs. Elmore's own assertion to think so; I never saw you looking better."

All that could savour of compliment in his words was taken out by the tone of his voice, which was curt, almost severe, and increased the deep colour which I felt suffusing my face. His good opinion I valued;—his was not an ordinary mind, whose praise or censure left no mark; on the contrary, for those who knew him well, it either honoured or annoyed. It was not then surprising that his present frigidity and covert reproof vexed and humbled me. Like the sensitive plant when touched, the fibres of feeling contracted, and I shrank from his cold, hard manner. Though aware of the good service he might do me, being so intimate with Lady Elmore, my pride was too much wounded to make any attempt to propitiate him, or justify myself. The time I had once deprecated in playful mood had somehow arrived; if Mr. Norris were not exactly an enemy, it was but too obvious that he was no more a friend.

Without a word of further explanation about my being in Florence, I addressed Madame Duval in French, aware that I thus indicated my absence from my family, and left him to the conclusion that I was exercising an independent judgment and continuing to follow the impulses of my high temper.

"We have had enough of the view, shall we visit the church?" was my question.

Madame Duval consented, but suddenly stopped, saying, "See, the whole pavement on which we are walking is composed of tombstones!"

It was so; the flags we trod upon served a double purpose. She stopped to examine a few, Mr. Norris still keeping his place by my side.

"I wonder how many of these lives have gone out leaving behind no record of usefulness so great as the

silent stone that covers their ashes!" remarked Mr. Norris. Reflection like this was so completely the habit of his mind that he could not suppress it.

"How many aching hearts have found here the rest denied to them in life!" I answered.

"None; a tyro in divinity could tell you that a sentient being finds no rest in the grave," was his reply.

I had spoken carelessly, out of a full heart, without weighing the exact import of my words. Finding him so captious, so sharp in making me an offender for a word, I determined to say no more, and walked directly towards the church, though, being vexed, I felt little interest in examining it.

Within as well as without the pavement was a history of the departed. Commemorative slabs of marble, some decorated with faded flowers, others with artificial, which, in pots and vases, were placed about the floor, covered the nave, and so thickly that it was hardly safe to look about. It was touching to observe how far back some of these memorials dated, which even now some tender hand strewed with pledges of a living affection. The crypt below was a repetition of the same, filled with tokens of cherished anniversaries.

Mr. Norris, who entered the church with us, talked to Madame Duval, and I kept apart. I could not survey these pathetic historics without moralising, nor moralise without a pang. The question cost me some bitter, bitter tears, but I asked it, nevertheless: "Were I laid low, who would hang such emblems of love and sorrow upon my grave?—not my nearest and dearest!"—and I felt then it might have been otherwise had I lived to a better purpose. A life of self-pleasure brings no sweet reminiscences when we stand face to face with these relics of mortality.

It is a standing fact, though mournful to contemplate, that some, gifted with faculties capable of better things, and rich in possessions, spend their time on earth faith-

less to their duties both to God and man, caring only for the enjoyment of the present hour. Such may, such must, pass away unknown, unregretted; the place that knew them "shall know them no more," for they leave no record behind.

My life till now had been a mistake. Egotistical and self-willed, I followed my natural inclinations, without reference to any positive rule of right. Alas! what is natural may lead us far astray, for our nature is faulty and weak. A sensitive conscience may even be an unsafe guide when dependent on surrounding associations. The true standard is not to be found in ourselves, only in the perfect teaching of the holy word; and that lesson I was learning through "the hard uses of adversity."

I was so depressed by my own reflections as not to be sorry when Madame Duval joined me, and called my attention to some fine old arabesques in a beading of coloured marble set in white, adorning the font and pulpit, very ancient and very rich. Forming the apse, behind the high altar, were five windows in transparent stone, more curious than pretty. The light varied in colour. Through one darkly veined it had a crimson hue, in others a golden, and in another green. The effect was remarkable, though not to be compared with that of tinted glass.

The jingling of keys causing us to look round, we perceived the sacristan, who invited us to visit the frescoes of the sacristy.

"Will not the gentleman come also?" he asked, indicating Mr. Norris, who was making his observations at some little distance.

"I do not know, he is not of our party," was my reply. This holding out the prospect of another fee, he immediately went and called him.

"What is to be seen?—anything very curious?" asked Mr. Norris, responding to the invitation by joining us.

Being informed that the room contained some singular

frescoes, almost as old as the church itself, he entered with us. We could hardly refrain from laughing aloud at the sight we had come to see—three representations of the monks exorcising Satan, a hideous, black, indescribable beast, with horns and a pointed head, in the position of a quadruped standing upright, whom to see would be to flee from with terror. Instinctively I turned towards Mr. Norris, expecting to hear from him something amusing ; but he was altogether serious, and observed, " Too gross in execution, besides being false in principle, the general fault of these monastic instructors. They seem to forget that where there is nothing to allure there is no temptation."

" Oh ! but they do good," said Madame Duval.

" To do any good," returned Mr. Norris, " there should be two of them, explanations one of the other. First show how things appear with their gilding upon them, and then how they really are. The unlettered peasant, taught to recognise in the picture before us the arch-enemy he is to shun, is likely to hug himself with the conviction that such a creature never crossed his path, or else after some drunken revel, when body and conscience are a little disturbed, to discover him under the material form of some wild goat or fantastic shadow. These and similar pictures are the cause of a great portion of the ignorance and superstition in these countries."

No one gainsaid his opinions, and no other conversation was started.

We left the church, accompanied by Mr. Norris outside the gate where the carriage was waiting. Politeness compelled me to offer him a seat, which, as I anticipated, was declined. On driving off, I saw him walking slowly towards another church close by. He had made no inquiries respecting my plans, nor informed me of his own, and we parted mutually ignorant, if not indifferent, where we were staying, whence we came, and whither we were going. I had lost all chance of securing his good-will, and he would

return home to throw the weight of his disapprobation in the scale against me. He had formerly been a staunch and loyal friend, and on one occasion, with true manhood, had silenced for me the gossip of Mrs. Kingstone. His indifference pained me greatly, making me sad and thoughtful all the rest of the day. If the absence of my husband's protection exposed me to coldness and severity, I felt that it was cruel and heartless in Herbert so completely to abandon me.

"Shall we go to the Pitti to-day?" said Madame Duval the following morning.

Being in one of my dark moods, I felt no particular interest in anything; but suffering myself to be persuaded about the middle of the day, we drove up the steep slope upon which the old palace stands. Ascending the red brick steps—a sort of back staircase, the usual though very unworthy entrance to these noble halls, which contain the richest treasures of art the world can produce, always excepting a few *chef-d'œuvres* to be found in the galleries of Dresden—the echo of English voices came distinctly towards me. It proceeded from a party before us, all strangers, at which I was pleased, the unpleasant meeting with Mr. Norris having made me unwilling to encounter former friends. We entered the gallery with them and began making the tour together, attracted by the observations of one of the number, who seemed both an artist and an authority. In this manner we made the tour of several of the rooms, giving our whole attention to the paintings. The speaker, perceiving the interest we felt in his remarks, addressed some of them expressly to us, pointed out the most remarkable works, and after explaining their particular merit, gave a short dissertation upon the decay of art in the present day.

Artists, he said, formerly consecrated their genius to religion, and found their patrons among rich men, who, whatever their personal character might be, knew that to

adorn altars, sanctuaries, and churches was to invest themselves with a certain odour of sanctity, and by that means to gain popularity. The wealthy were often ready and liberal purchasers. A Madonna or a Magdalene was an esteemed and costly gift. A saint linked a man's name with Paradise, and was willingly offered to obtain favour with the Church, when not a single sin or fleshly lust would be renounced for God. Those days were gone by. Superstition had been losing ground among the educated, and with it went much of the encouragement the disciples of art had received from it. Madonnas being at a discount, painters, in order to please, must invent or find fresh subjects, and that is not so easy as to multiply the old. "Not that religion has gained," added the speaker, in concluding his remarks; "for we know that enlightenment is not necessarily piety, the fetters of credulity may be thrown off without any profit to the spirit or the life."

Whether he was a professed artist, or only an amateur, he was eminently a gentleman, and seemed to stand high in the opinion of his companions. We had been so much interested as to give no attention to the other persons in the room. When at last the little group began to scatter, Madame Duval and I, detaching ourselves from the party, proceeded to a more minute examination of the pictures that had most interested us. Unable to determine which was the superior painting, the Madonna of Murillo, or Raphael's Madonna della Seggiola, two world-famed celebrities, we endeavoured to facilitate the decision by going from one to the other. A little man, with grey hair and a grey coat, perched on a high stool, or rather a ladder with a seat on the top, placed before the latter picture, which he was copying, appeared amused at our difficulty, and advanced the painting, which moved on a hinge, into a better light, in order to assist our investigations.

At that moment a tremor, almost amounting to a shock, seized me, for I heard myself suddenly addressed by name.

Looking round, I saw my former rival, Miss Rogers, and a gentleman, whom she presented as her husband, Sir Watkins Dacre, a quiet, sensible man, judging from his cast of countenance, and much older than herself.

I had not time to offer a word of congratulation before all my ideas were put to flight by the startling question—"Is Mr. Elmore with you?"

"Mr. Elmore with me!" I repeated, not knowing in my surprise what I said.

"Yes, he was here, in this very room, yesterday."

I did hear the words, but the sound was something like the discharge of a pistol close to my head; and then the pictures danced about, a number of eyes were placed on me, and I remember nothing more until I found myself lying on a leathern bench in the ante-room. Lady Dacre and Madame Duval were near me, one bathing my hands and temples with eau de Cologne, the other holding my bonnet and gloves in one hand and a glass of water in the other, while at a little distance stood the kind grey-haired artist, with a bottle of water which he had procured for me.

"I am very sorry," began Lady Dacre, as soon as she perceived me somewhat revived.

A further expression of regret was stopped by a signal from Madame Duval, who hastily manifested her sympathy by stringing together numerous kindly epithets without connection, a mosaic of both languages: "Ma mie, mon choux, mon trésor—my dear, my child."

"Raise me, will you; I am better now. Can I not go home?" said I, making an effort to sit up.

"Wait a few minutes; he will soon return," replied Madame Duval.

He! What did she mean? Had we not just been speaking of Mr. Elmore? My brain was confused, my thoughts entangled, but there was a tumultuous beating at my heart. Putting up my hand to my brow, as if that action would chase away some of my bewilderment, I tried to think, when

the great door of the ante-room was swung open, and Mr. Norris entered.

"I am glad to see that you are recovering," he said, in a softer tone than he had used the day previous; then addressing Madame Duval, he continued, "There is a carriage below ready for Mrs. Elmore when she feels well enough to go down."

Again I had been unfortunate in coming accidentally under the notice of Mr. Norris. While they were carrying me to the bench outside, he entered the gallery, and Madame Duval, concluding from the interview at San Miniato that he was an intimate acquaintance, had bespoken his services, knowing that François would not bring the carriage for a couple of hours.

Sir Watkin and Lady Dacre were profuse in their offers of assistance. "Where shall we call to inquire after you? Which is your hotel?" asked the latter.

Madame Duval gave our address, while I took the arm Mr. Norris silently offered; and, after a little leave-taking, the Dacres returned to the pictures, and we descended the staircase.

"Did you know that Mr. Elmore was in Florence?" I asked, as soon as they left us.

Mr. Norris looked at me steadily, obviously much surprised at the question.

"No; who said he was here?"

"Lady Dacre; she met him in the gallery yesterday. Oh! Mr. Norris," I continued, nervously clasping his arm and speaking as earnestly as emotion would permit, "do find him out. With all my faults I love my husband dearly; do me this service, and—and——"

I could say no more, and hoped that the unspoken request was understood. A rush of feeling overpowered me, making me nearly helpless.

Mr. Norris almost lifted me into the carriage, and saying, "Hotel d'Italie, I believe," gave the necessary directions to the coachman.

"You shall soon hear from me," he added, as we drove away, when I had the great disappointment of seeing him re-enter the gallery, gone, as I supposed, to avail himself of the present opportunity for examining the works of the dead, careless that a living heart was throbbing with the agony of suspense. I thought him and all the world selfish and unfeeling, and some expression of the bitter feeling escaped me.

"I think he is gone to procure information from the lady," replied Madame Duval.

It was more than probable that I had done him injustice, for he had looked kindly on me in my trouble, and had been even brotherly in his care. Her supposition was a relief, and I regretted my hasty condemnation. It hurt me to think ill of him. But the time went by—one, two, three hours passed away, while I hoped and feared, was weary with waiting, and very sick at heart—and he did not return.

CHAPTER XXII.

DISAPPOINTMENT.

ONE fact grew into distinctness out of all this watching and waiting. Herbert was not far off, and an unexpected vision of brighter days rose dimly in the distance. He had been seen yesterday, he might be with me to-day. Mr. Norris had perhaps found him, and was even now trying to bring us together.

"He is probably out, and Mr. Norris is either gone after him or waiting his return to the hotel. There are so many objects of interest in the city, as well as in the neighbourhood," observed I to Madame Duval, struggling to hope, as the time wore on without either of them appearing. "He may be gone to the Certosa or to Fiesole, and in either case will not be back till dinner-time."

"Very likely," answered Madame Duval; "but you had better rest now, or you will not be fit to talk to him when he does come."

That was true; my restless wandering up and down the room, added to my recent attack of indisposition, was not calculated to increase the self-control required for the coming interview. My brain was weak and dull, and gave no answer to the oft-recurring question, what I should say to him when he did come, or what chances I had of softening him in my favour. I believe I trusted most to perseverance, knowing that importunity is sometimes successful when all else fails. As the prospect of meeting gained upon me—for the hope once excited, I could not let it go—my whole soul went out towards him. It could not be that

when he saw me so unhappy and so repentant, he would feel no relenting. I was the wife whom he had once wooed with words that bore the semblance of love, and I was the mother of his child. Oh! could it be that there was nothing in his bosom, absolutely nothing, which would plead for me?

A knock at the door came at last, rousing me from the sofa pillows among which I had buried my face. Unable to speak from the violence of my emotion, Madame Duval responded, "Entrez," while I, expectant yet trembling, fixed my eager eyes on the door.

Very slowly it appeared to me to open, so intense was the strain of that moment of suspense, to be exchanged for mournful certainty when Mr. Norris entered, and alone, annihilating the baseless hopes I had been cherishing, by closing the door after him.

Quickly requesting me not to disturb myself, he approached with a serious countenance, and drawing a chair near my sofa, sat down, saying at once, "I have some news to give."

My cheek must have flushed with expectation, for he looked rather sorrowfully at me as he added—

"Not, I fear, what you will call good news. Your information was correct; Elmore has been here. He left yesterday afternoon for Pisa, where one of his companions has been laid up with illness. As soon as he is well enough they return to the yacht, now at Spezzia, undergoing some repairs. He was staying at the Hotel de la Ville with a friend, whose name I did not ascertain. This account may not be entirely true, having been obtained second-hand from the waiters, who heard it from his man; but it has the appearance of probability. It is quite certain that Elmore left yesterday."

For me it was all true. Though so near we were as much separated as ever; and the most discouraging thought was the style of companionship Herbert had chosen, for I could

not doubt that the stranger whom we had met at Pisa was the friend in question.

Considerately leaving me to recover from the grief I could not conceal, Mr. Norris addressed a few remarks on indifferent subjects to Madame Duval, who was working at a table near. At length I was able to thank him for the trouble he had taken.

"My intelligence will probably change your plans," he said, "and induce you to return to England."

"Return!—what inducement have I to return? I have no home, no ties, no life anywhere!" I answered, with bitterness. "What does it matter to any one whither I go?"

"You have a mother's charge; have you not also a mother's heart? Suffer me to speak plainly, Mrs. Elmore; it is an occasion when I think I may put aside the rule of strict politeness. Far be it from me to justify Herbert Elmore in the conduct he is pursuing; but, until he chooses to change it, your proper place is with Lady Elmore and Percy. I answer for it that you have friends with interest and good-will enough to procure your reception at the Beeches."

Lady Emily was, I knew, the friend meant. It was not pride that made me reject all idea of her kindly offices—heavy sorrow had swept that away, at least, so I persuaded myself; but the prospect of such a return was intolerable. My spirit had not vigour enough. Alas! in spite of my low estimation of myself, my heart was not humble enough to bear the life proposed. My sister's home had neither interested nor roused me, though all the energies of loving natures were exerted on my behalf; how then could I bear to pass the weary days in the chilling atmosphere I must expect to breathe if living with my mother-in-law? Though originally the aggressor, since in the early days of my married life I took no pains to please—her stiff propriety and utter want of sympathy with me would make such companionship a burden.

On this point I was not to be persuaded, and answered, with decision, "I cannot go to the Beeches."

Mr. Norris looked at me gravely, as if pitying my obstinacy, and then remarked, with a cold stateliness which wounded me more than his words, "It would be something more than a hollow compliment to say that you know best, that being exactly what I am inclined to dispute. You are, however, free to decide for yourself—unhappily too free for a young and handsome woman. I see you have taken some care to invest yourself with external decorum"—here he glanced towards Madame Duval—"but you are not acting with the prudence which I would recommend to a sister, or to any one in whom I took interest. Turn back, Mrs. Elmore; take the advice of a man who——" he hesitated; I saw he would not call himself a friend, he would not permit our conversation to be on its former footing, yet he did not like to leave me unwarned—"who knows life better than you do," he continued. "However distasteful it may be, make friends with Lady Elmore, and place yourself under her protection. The end may be sweeter than the beginning."

The wisdom of the step was apparent even to me; would that there had been in me resolution enough to take it! Cordially disliking the advice, reasons came readily enough to excuse my following it. There was an incompatibility of temper between us, making it more than probable that we should disagree. With little regard on my side, and no indulgence on hers, it was next to impossible but that offences should come. In a worldly spirit I heeded the denunciation pronounced on him "by whom they come," and would not risk, through petulance or carelessness, converting a quiescent into an active enemy.

"Give me some other counsel," said I, beseechingly; "I never can make up my mind to go to Lady Elmore; tell me the next best thing to be done. I cannot face the misery you would bring upon me."

"Then return to England at once and live near Lady Elmore, if you will not make up your mind to the wiser course of residing under her roof."

This was better, but still very unpalatable, and I felt then crushed and ill.

"My friends sent me abroad for change, my doctor also." I waited, hoping that my statement would have some weight, but Mr. Norris merely bowed.

"I will stay abroad a little longer; I must recruit my health and spirits, and—then—perhaps——" Here I stopped, his eagle eye not permitting me to deceive either myself or him.

"As you please, Mrs. Elmore," he replied, after waiting till the hot, conscious flush had well overspread my face; "I gave advice partly because you asked, partly because you required it. I do not wish to press my opinion unwarrantably."

He rose to depart. Without doubt I had lost his esteem, forfeited also the portion of regard I once possessed, yet I could not allow him to range himself against me without an appeal.

"You are going back to Holmewood, and will often be a visitor at the Beeches—you will not be an enemy, Mr. Norris, though I do not follow your advice," said I, looking at him as earnestly as my swimming eyes permitted, and trying to steady my voice. "My intentions are really good," I faltered, after a pause, discouraged at not meeting with a response. An intense desire to set myself right with him, and enlist his kindness on my side, prevailing over every other consideration.

"Our present intentions have the faculty of appearing so, especially when they coincide with our personal wishes," he said, drily; "it may nevertheless prove a great mistake to carry them out."

"Don't let Lady Elmore speak harshly of me—not more so than you conscientiously must," said I, rather meekly.

He was offering his hand for a farewell, and retained mine as he replied with one of his old smiles, and what seemed like a return to his playful cynicism, "Sono fragili le belle cose."

Such reconciliation as could be made was effected. If I had not regained his friendship, he was softened towards me, and would not, I knew, on his return be hostile to my cause, though he might not be willing to defend it.

In consequence of what Mr. Norris had told me respecting Herbert, I at first conceived the idea of returning to Pisa, but other considerations restrained me. My letter returned unopened, the long period elapsed without his testifying any interest in my welfare, and the unforgiving disposition too apparent in the family, all tended to discourage me. There was yet another and more powerful reason. To judge a man by the company he keeps, is universally allowed to be fair and reasonable. As I had every reason to believe the individual we saw at Pisa was the sick friend spoken of, there was no hope of any favourable change having taken place in Herbert's character; on the contrary, he must have lost in manly refinement, or he would not have chosen for his companion one who appeared to be so different from himself.

The subtle links of sympathy are more easily explained than the strong repulsion sometimes conceived for an individual without any assignable cause. Reason is dumb, and dare not justify the antipathy which yet is forcing us, as if by intuition, to judge harshly and take up a hostile attitude. Whence comes it? We are puzzled to find an answer. May it not be one of those unfathomable mysteries connecting the laws of the nervous system and electricity, the peculiar property of highly-sensitive natures? Be it as it may, I had conceived a deep aversion for the stranger at Pisa. The supposition that he was my husband's friend, likely in any way to influence him, had a disturbing effect

upon me, and made me renounce the idea of following him as soon as formed.

We determined to remain a few days longer in Florence, and afterwards, as first proposed, to proceed to Rome. The next few days passed without adventure or again encountering Mr. Norris. The Dacres called, and we passed each other a few times in the fashionable drive of the Cascine Gardens, but happily I met no more of my former acquaintance. The Duomo was frequently visited; one could never tire of its lofty proportions and artistic claims, whether sauntering about its magnificent aisles or listening to the pealing organ vibrating through them.

On issuing from it one morning, we paused on the steps to admire the gates and marbles of the baptistery opposite, just then glowing in the sunshine. The black and white layers were beautiful as well as regular. "Carrara marble," observed I to my companion, the white line at that moment gleaming with striking purity. "Mais ce n'est pas possible!" exclaimed Madame Duval. Without comprehending the difficulty I assured her of the fact, adding that when we passed Pietrasante on the road to Pisa we were close to the quarries. "They find it *so!*" she exclaimed, in a doubtful tone, and continued to gaze, first at me and then at the building, with the air of one called upon to credit something difficult of comprehension.

A low laugh, also the observation, "Nature's workshop is wonderful and her workmen rarely skilled!" made me recognise the presence of Mr. Norris and the *naïveté* we had unconsciously perpetrated. Madame Duval thought I was assuring her that the tastefully inlaid marble was a natural production. She was destined just then to afford Mr. Norris amusement. The tall Campanile next engaged her attention; its tiers of columns, marble circles, and window-frames of different colours delighted her; but by a singular mixture of ideas, as well as a peculiar appreciation of beauty, she likened it to the Tower of Babel. Mr. Norris

seemed at first inclined to prolong the conversation, perhaps to show her off, but quickly subsided into his new stateliness.

"Your travels will not, I think, want for interest," he said, "should you resolve upon continuing them instead of adopting the more prudent course I have had the honour to advise."

With a glance of reproach, and a salutation which in politeness was irreproachable, he left us to join some gentlemen who were carefully inspecting the bronze gate, pronounced, by Michael Angelo, worthy to be the entrance to Paradise.

We saw him no more. The following morning his card "pour prendre congé" lay on my table, left whilst we were out. He was then about to quit Florence, whether to pursue his travels or return to England, I knew not. He had been altogether reserved with me, nor did I ascertain the cause of his estrangement until two years afterwards, when we met under circumstances for which I was entirely unprepared.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE JOURNEY.

IT was the middle of March when we found ourselves actually *en route* for Rome. Unmoved by Mr. Norris' opinion as to the expediency of returning at once to England, I was bent on continuing my journey. When so near the grand city which, for more than two thousand years, has occupied the attention of the world, and whose destiny absorbs more of the thoughts and labours of the learned than any other, was it probable that I could inflict upon myself the disappointment of turning back? Besides, now that fresh interests were kindled, was I not likely to derive positive advantage from visiting the memorials of her past history?

Two roads were discussed. From Florence to Leghorn by rail, and thence by sea to Civita Vecchia, was the surest and the most tempting to those who had the fear of brigands before them; the other, all the way by land, had the most attraction for me. The result of inquiry was so far satisfactory that no disaster of any kind had been heard of during this year. So little ground did there appear for alarm that the administration of the post ridiculed the idea of fear, and even François, who was none of the bravest, suffering himself to be persuaded, counselled us to go by Sienna. The bargain was struck, the arrangements were made.

We left Florence by an early train, and on reaching Sienna, where the railway then ended, we found carriage and horses and postillion waiting our arrival. Of all modes

of travelling, posting is the most exhilarating. I doubt whether we have not lost in pleasurable sensation by the substitution of the iron line. The quick pace, even motion, and especially the absence of those long halts which cut the thread of enjoyment and considerably increase fatigue, made our progress at first pleasant and exciting. While the sun shone brightly, all went well, though the scenery was uninteresting; but as it approached the horizon, the bleak and dismal character of the country became more apparent. The ascent was long and wearisome, we thought it would never end or change—its monotonous barrenness being only occasionally broken by solitary wayside houses few and far between. Day was fast declining as we entered upon the wild and winding road leading to the summit of the Radicofani, where, in an old monastery of that name, now serving as an inn and post-house, we were to pass the night. Far as the eye could rove, no trace of human habitation appeared, and, save for a few blades of grass mixed with stones and thistles, there were no signs of vegetation, nothing to vary the bleak wretchedness of this volcanic region. The monks must have had a weary time of it. In comparison with the contemplation of scenes dreary as these appeared to us, their penances and vigils must have been a pleasing variety. As if to deepen the gloom and give us a foretaste of the disagreeables in store, just before attaining the summit, and whilst in a part best adapted to give us the full benefit of a storm, the elements seemed to break loose. A howling wind swept over the mountain, and soon, from the darkened sky, fell large hailstones, thickly strewing one side of the carriage before we could succeed in getting the window closed.

The crashing and rattling of the pitiless storm prepared us to be easily satisfied with our accommodation. Any port in a storm we were inclined to welcome when exposed to its fury—we were cold and spiritless, and the day had passed into twilight; that too was quickly deepening every

moment. But when fairly arrived at our destination, I, for one, was almost disposed to change my mind. The aspect of this resting-place for travellers in the dull mountain solitude, as it then appeared, was far from reassuring. Seen by that light, the building had a suspicious appearance. Several dark-visaged men were lounging about the door, and eyed us curiously from under their shaggy brows ; while the brown dress, so nearly resembling that worn by our convicts, added something to the uncomfortable feelings which had at once taken possession of us. Within, the cold, damp air and dingy look pervading everythingt he eye rested upon, completed the moral depression produced by the general appearance of the place. The stairs creaked as we walked up them, compelling us to cast stealthy glances around in spite of every desire to show a brave front to each other, and the long corridors, with their cheerless, raftered roofs, looked blank and dismal. A small tallow candle, carried by the host, if host he were, through the passages, so intricate and winding that one wondered if they would ever end, and where they would lead, only served to make darkness visible. We stopped at last, and were ushered into a room of tolerable dimensions, bare and dreary, though, judging from a slab over the door, proudly pointed out by our conductor, it was probably the best in the hotel, it being there set forth that Pope Pius the Seventh once slept within those walls. An adjoining room being assigned to Madame Duval, and another somewhere near to Watson, the landlord asked for our commands. Fire, candles, something to eat—whatever they had to offer—was all we ventured to order, and this was in due time produced, accompanied by wine, which, though probably not of vintage which would have pleased the former inhabitants of these cells, was not bad. François, after depositing the shawls and night-bags, and whispering mysteriously the hour of departure for the following morning, so low as not only to remind us of the old saying, that "walls have

ears," but also that a necessity for caution existed, disappeared altogether. Watson declared that, when she left the carriage, the men below were closely examining the luggage strapped behind. Giving it as her opinion that we were in a very nest of robbers, she entreated to be allowed to have the scraps left from our simple repast, and to sit in a corner of my room all night. Once served, we were left to ourselves, no one came near us, and there being no bell, no one could be summoned.

Not a petticoat had we seen, nor any vestige of womankind in the house. By nine o'clock very little fire remained. If any of the household were astir there was no sign of it; a stillness, more discouraging than the dulness, or even the creaking boards which had at first disturbed us, reigned throughout the corridors. All three we sat together, watching the decaying embers, wondering if we were the victims of our own imaginary fears and of their semi-barbarous simplicity, or if we had really fallen upon a time and place which gave cause for alarm. Not long were we left to this isolation, undisturbed as yet by any sound whatever.

I was stirring together the few bits of braise still alight, when, without the preliminary echo of footsteps, weak and feeble tappings were heard at the door, accompanied by a sound as of some one feeling for the handle, and then it slowly opened. Madame Duval screamed aloud, Watson flung herself on her knees and hid her face, and I turned round as I was, with the tongs fast clutched in my hands.

Not easy is it to give a correct description of the sort of thing that entered, before which our woman's cowardice had been so unequivocally revealed. The principal impression was that of a long, bony, attenuated human body, in the style of an exaggerated caricature, surmounted by a tall conical hat, exceeding all ordinary proportions. This figure, advancing into the middle of the room by a kind of saltatory progression, resembling more the movements of a

grasshopper than those of a man, laid a tray of petrified medals on the already encumbered table. Taking up first one, then another, and glibly running through a number of names, among which we recognised the two Napoleons, Nicholas of Russia, Byron, and *Childe Harold*, whom he obviously supposed to be another genius among the family of poets, he thrust them successively into our faces, repeating the ominous word "cheap," which on foreign lips—perhaps at home also—generally signifies imposition.

When a little recovered from our fright, and able to examine the intruder, we found, to our unspeakable relief, that he appeared harmless, if not half-witted: but a closer inspection revealed that undue development of cunning we are apt to associate with incipient insanity. We naturally became anxious to get rid of him amicably and quietly, there being no hope of obtaining assistance from without, and for a time we were puzzled how to accomplish it. By words and gestures, indicating great fatigue and a desire to sleep, after some difficulty he received the idea that we wished to be left to ourselves. With sundry jerks, meant for bows, which brought the unremoved conical hat still more in evidence, he left the room in the same peculiar manner he had entered it, displaying a length of body which gave him a marvellously weird-like look, and paused in the doorway to take a good survey of the apartment.

His visit only tended to increase the general fear. Watson, asserting that he noticed the situation of our different bags and boxes, proceeded to change the place of every object in the chamber. Madame Duval, carrying him a stage higher in design, pronounced him the pioneer of the robber band that was to attack us on the morrow. Indisposed for bed or sleep, we sat up, frightening instead of strengthening each other, till cold and weariness prevailing over disquietude, we agreed to retire to rest. Madame Duval, the most timid of the three, invited Watson to share her room, an offer gladly accepted, as she had lost all recol-

lection of the situation of her own. Our rooms were near each other, but not communicating, Madame Duval's being several yards distant, and only reached by passing down the gloomy corridor. As they turned into the darkness, the feeble lights they carried showing only as tiny sparks, I watched them from my threshold till they disappeared under the doorway. The humiliating truth may as well be told—their echoing footfalls in the great stillness sent a creepy, chilly sensation all over me.

My door locked easily—too easily, I thought, as it might be as easily undone. Piling against the entrance every available article I had strength to move, I cowered over the ashes and waited—waited for what? I did not know; but imagination had so wrought upon my nerves that I was afraid to go to bed, persuaded that if I did, something would happen. I must have fallen asleep without knowing it, for I was suddenly roused by a noise, and, listening eagerly, heard footsteps approaching nearer and nearer. Straining my ear to catch every sound, I became aware that more than one person was moving in the corridor. They stopped at my door—my heart stood still—I felt afraid it was the mountebank returning, most probably with companions stronger than himself.

Dear life was at that moment inexpressibly precious, although I had so often mourned over it as wearisome and joyless. The touchstone now applied, its value was revealed, and I made up my mind to part with everything I possessed in order to preserve it. Whilst I resolved, distinctly came the words, "Ci sono signore." Expecting some one to enter, I stood up. But no, the steps passed on, and soon all was still as before, except that once or twice I heard the opening and shutting of a door. Listening became too painful at last, I could bear it no longer, and was compelled to seek my pillow, longing for the day to disperse the darkness and consequent anxiety.

A knock, this time loud and fearless, caused me to un-

close my eyes. A yellowish shimmering light, entering through the dilapidated shutters, revealed at once the poverty of the room and the happy fact that morning had dawned. Watson, rejoicing I believe in her unexpected existence, had come to remind me that it was time to rise. With breakfast, François appeared, and suggested a speedy departure. The travelling bags and wraps were again taken down, and by ordinary hands, that is, by persons who inspired neither suspicion nor fear. Madame Duval had already followed, and I was about to do the same, when stopped by the queer proprietor of the conical hat, which might have been taken for a fixture, so completely did it appear a part of himself. Holding something in his hand, and pointing with an air of triumph to the tablet over the door, he commenced a series of nods and becks, which I afterwards discovered signified his belief that having slept in the room once blessed by the presence of a Pope, I could not be so infatuated as to renounce the charm, and refuse to purchase his likeness.

The prospect of getting away made me good-natured. I was also thankful for deliverance from what I seriously regarded as the perils of the night, so I bade François make the purchase, and went downstairs. Outside the door was a flood of sunshine. Though it found no entrance into the stone basement or upper corridors, it nevertheless gave such a different aspect to the whole scene, that I felt somewhat ashamed of the terrors of the preceding evening. Besides, there were a few house-roofs visible in the distance. We had not after all been completely isolated from our fellow-creatures; though if the men we saw hanging about the carriage were fair specimens of the rest, there was not much gained by being in their proximity. Our heated imaginations might have alarmed us unnecessarily. Terror past may be terror enjoyed, but assuredly it is very painful whilst it lasts.

Madame Duval, already seated in the carriage, was in

earnest conversation with a tall, military-looking man, who appeared the proprietor of a light travelling carriage drawn up by the side of our own. At my approach he turned round. It was impossible not to read in that clear, refined countenance an English gentleman of birth and breeding. If he would be considered handsome when examined by the strict rules of art, I do not know; it is a question that has never troubled me. Regularity and even beauty of feature is secondary in comparison with the noble carriage, aristocratic lineaments, and sympathising eyes, which softened with concern as the lively French woman described our meagre accommodation, and detailed the anxiety we had undergone.

"I fear I was the unconscious cause of your alarm last night," he said, addressing me in a low, pleasant voice, when I came up to them.

"An addition only; truth compels me to own that our cowardice was sufficiently demonstrated on our first arrival."

In the broad daylight and in a presence so reassuring, I could afford to laugh at the recollection of terror which now appeared ludicrous. "However," I added, "it would then have been an unspeakable comfort to know that an English gentleman was under the same roof as ourselves."

"Is the road safe? Have you heard of any brigands about?" inquired Madame Duval, in a piteous tone of disquietude.

"Yesterday, I came over the same ground you are now going, and at a later hour than is usual with travellers, and neither heard nor saw any person or thing to create alarm."

"Exactly because you did travel at a later hour than usual, perhaps," I replied, speaking impulsively, the thought of the moment.

It seemed to make an impression. Moving a step backwards, he examined attentively the postillion then standing by his horses, and next took a careful survey of François, who by this time had joined us. After giving me the newly-purchased medal, he stood at the open door, waiting

to assist me into the carriage. The scrutiny was apparently satisfactory, for, addressing me with a calm expression and pointing to the medal, the stranger hoped we should have no worse encounter than the likeness-vendor. "I really see no occasion for uneasiness; you are starting early, and will arrive at Viterbo in a few hours."

He watched us off, wishing us a good journey with one of those winning smiles that make a deep impression. It did not only light up the face, but beautified it, and was, I thought, indicative of a character softened and mellowed by other causes than either time or reflection. It was a countenance one did not quite like to think had been seen for the last time.

"A thorough English gentleman," said I, as soon as we were out of hearing, honestly thinking the compliment a high one. "C'est un personnage," responded Madame Duval, with the air of a connoisseur.

Conversation over this accidental meeting, as well as over the fears of the past night, which no reasoning could persuade Madame Duval to believe unfounded, beguiled the way for some time. There was little variety in the landscape, and nothing to engage our attention until we stopped to change horses, when François informed us that we were soon to enter the Papal territories, and must be detained awhile at the frontier.

A dark little man, so covered with hair that scarcely any part of his face was visible, except the roundest, blackest, and sharpest of eyes, came peering into the carriage. His appearance was remarkable; so far removed from a human visage, that it might almost have served as an excuse for some of the eccentricities of science which trace man's descent from apes and gorillas. Taking him to be the postmaster, Madame Duval put the constantly recurring questions—"Is the road safe? Are there any brigands about?"

"Perfectly safe in this country—no brigands this side of

the frontier, but plenty on the other," he replied, with a merry twinkle of the eye, retiring a step backwards, for the postillion was seated, and the wheels were already in motion.

"What did he mean?" asked my companion, with alarm.

"Only a little waggery," I replied; "nothing serious."

Madame Duval was pacified. My own fears were destined to be aroused before long. Arrived at the Custom House, the boxes were taken down, and a long parley took place between François and the officials; a silver scudo passed between them, and everything was soon restored to its place. The face of François, as he took his seat on the cabriolet, struck me as being very pale. Thinking it might be fancy or accidental, I said nothing to my companion, who was always ready to take alarm even without cause, and afterwards was very glad I had been so prudent.

The journey proved uneventful. We arrived at Viterbo early in the afternoon, ere the sun's decline flung a disquieting shadow across the road, or the hushed alarm of Madame Duval had again broken forth.

At Viterbo, as at Radicofani, it was our fortune to occupy the rooms once before inhabited by royalty. My bed-room, slept in by Nicholas, Emperor of all the Russias, as was ostentatiously set forth, was large and pretentious, but deficient in every representative of comfort. The sitting-room formed a part of the state apartment also. It was grand and cheerless, not at all calculated to diminish the anxieties of the way, which were both renewed and strengthened by the strange manner of the waiter and the people of the house. With a solemn demeanour the former watched us narrowly. Was he pitying us as victims about to be sacrificed, or was he weighing our value? At dinner, from the other side of the table, I saw him almost start, his eye flashed and opened so wide that I knew something unusual had caught his attention. Almost immediately I became aware of the sparkle of the diamonds on my fingers, the light falling on

them as I reached out my hand for the water-bottle. In very shame, the colour rose to my cheek at this childish want of forethought. Taking advantage of his first absence from the room, I removed the largest and best of my rings, hoping that, finding them less striking at a second glance, the impression might be less vivid.

The dinner over, we sat round the fire, welcome enough at day's decline in these countries, where the sun in its meridian height streams so fiercely down, causing sometimes even in summer a chilliness in the evening. Tired with our journey, and still more so by the broken sleep of the night before, we retired early to our rooms, having first received a request from François to be ready both for breakfast and starting a good half-hour before the time mentioned over night. Afraid of the effect upon Madame Duval, I purposely abstained from asking questions, and promised as required.

A sound of carriage wheels and a bustle in the hall as of some one arriving, just before we retired, gave rise to a hope that travellers might be going the same route as ourselves the next day. Madame Duval suggested that the gentleman met at Radicofani was returning; that, however, was highly improbable, his destination being evidently the other way.

The temporary annoyance produced by the rings soon passed from my mind, and I fell into a sleep, which appeared to have been a short one, when Watson awoke me in the early morning. She brought word that François was already busy hurrying the preparations for departure. I was soon up, and, when dressed, left my room. The staircase was opposite our sitting-room, situated about the centre of a long corridor, the other end of which was rather dark.

After two or three steps, I perceived a gentleman coming towards the staircase, talking to another behind him, and recognised the stranger we had met at Pisa, but no longer an invalid. His walk was firm and quick, and the voice,

then a little raised, had in it the ring and strength of healthy manhood.

Not wishing to be seen, I slipped back into the shelter of the doorway, and waited, until having turned down the stairs, he could no longer perceive me. His companion followed slowly, the head bent slightly downwards, and carefully examining a pistol he carried in his hand. A step more and he was in the light. With one bound and a loud cry, I was at his side—" Herbert !—my dear husband ! "

" Are you mad ? The pistol is loaded. Let go directly."

These were the words exchanged between us. Unable to loose my hold, although I made him angry, nay, holding on from very nervousness, I clutched tighter the arm I had seized.

Dropping the pistol into the other hand, he suffered me to drag him inside the open door where the cloth was laid for breakfast, or rather, I believe, he moved me in that direction, a dread of scenes and publicity being always paramount with him.

" Let go directly, Una ; how could you be so ill-advised as to come in search of me ?"

The blue eyes had turned to a whitish grey in his anger, and his brow was dark and knitted. He thought I was following him, and about to drag our quarrel forward by forcing myself into the presence of his friends. Not an unreasonable suspicion on his part ; he had only known me through my impulsive antecedents, and found in the past no guarantee for reason or prudence now. And what was worse, I had no power to set him right, no energy to repudiate the charge. In the few words that had passed, still more in the tone with which they were spoken, I read a stolid indifference, an undiminished displeasure. Although I lost my presence of mind, I knew I wanted something, and had the instinct awake that so long as I held him fast, that good desired, that urgent need was not beyond my reach. Could I have assured him that this meeting was

accidental, I might have mollified him a little; but I could not speak coherently, nor could I find words in which to frame my request for the restoration of Percy.

By a sudden jerk he snatched himself away for a moment, but I caught him again ere he recovered his freedom, and looked earnestly into his face, hoping that my dumb entreaty would move him, every attempt to speak ending in a senseless stammer.

A voice from below shouted "Elmore! Elmore! where are you?" and I think he heard steps mounting the stairs.

"You are acting like a lunatic, Una," said Herbert, impatiently, and wrenching himself free, he bounded towards the staircase. It was the work of a second.

As he disappeared, I sank down into the nearest chair and looked on while the waiter, who then entered, made the preparations for breakfast, watching with my outward sense every object placed upon the table—the bread, the butter, the coffee, and the steaming flagon of milk, wondering if the latter were really as hot as it appeared. I neither moved nor thought, except about the milk. The inner consciousness was locked up, not a feeling stirred until, when all was ready, the waiter uttered the stereotyped hotel phrase, "Madame est servie." Then I started, and a rush of bewildering questions came over me. Had I been dreaming, or was it true that Herbert and I stood face to face—that my hands had been clasped about him; clasped about him with despairing tenacity, and only to be roughly shaken off. My heart's cry, "Herbert!—my dear husband!" still rang in my ears, but mixed with the harsh accents that had responded. Yes, it was all true—too true. I, Una Randolph, had rejected one love after another to centre my foolish affections where they were not only unrequited, but disdained.

So far I had awakened out of my torpor, when Madame Duval, who from the balcony had been watching the scene

below too intently to have an idea of what had been taking place in her proximity, called on me to join her.

"Come here, Mrs. Elmore, pray come and see this party off. There are three gentlemen, all with pistols in their pockets, ostentatiously displayed. Done on purpose, I should say, to impress the people standing about. Two cases of pistols, open for every one to see, have already been put into the carriage. They are going our way. I wish we were ready to start. Perhaps they would wait for us, if you asked them. Would it not be agreeable for the two carriages to travel in company?"

"Breakfast is ready," I replied, in a voice which sounded strange to my own ears.

Madame Duval, too absorbed in watching the travellers to notice me, continued commenting upon what she saw.

"Look! look! I think they are going to wait. One of them is talking to François. He is pointing to our carriage. No. They are going. Tiens! tiens!" she suddenly exclaimed in the tone of one making a discovery, "here is the gentleman we saw at Pisa; the others look like brothers."

"Breakfast is ready," I repeated, without noticing her observations.

She came as the carriage wheels rattled over the stones, lamenting that we were not ready to start with them.

"The carriage is before the door, will madam come down as soon as possible. Everything is prepared," said François, when he entered the room soon afterwards, to carry off the shawls and stray parcels.

Not much time was lost. I had no appetite for breakfast, and Madame Duval, all eagerness and excitement, finished hers quickly and without observing me, her one idea being to overtake the other party if possible. When about to enter the carriage, remarking that for the first time we had four horses, I stepped back, and by a glance required of François an explanation, we having been especially recommended to travel simply and with only a pair.

"One of the gentlemen advised it for this stage, thinking we might perhaps be up with them before they had gone any distance."

My heart beat. "Which?" inquired I, eagerly.

"The tall one."

The blood rushed quickly to my cheek, and I was conscious of a pleasurable emotion. Herbert was tall. Though the stranger of Pisa was not short, tall did not appear the right description of him.

As anxious now to be off as Madame Duval herself, it was provoking to encounter delay. Something was wrong with the harness, next with the luggage. A shouting and screaming ensued, accompanied by pantomimic gesticulations, which at another time might have amused, but now only increased my impatience. The hindrance was removed at last; the two postillions mounted their horses, and the carriage rattled on its way, at a pace threatening to smash to atoms any obstacle that might happen to lie in the path.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE MEETING OF OLD FRIENDS.

UPHILL and downhill, faster and yet faster the carriage rattled on, all objects melting away in the distance, making no distinct impression. Leaning back in the carriage, I took no note of time or scene, except that my ears, not my mind, caught the running comments of my companion, sometimes in English, sometimes in French, but generally in a language of her own, a mixture of both. "Voila des soldats français. Ah! quel bonheur! Nous sommes sauvées. Not many in sight pourtant—there must be more of them. See, that large building must be a *caserne*. What have we here? Two horsemen! The Pope's police. Ils n'ont pas l'air guerrier. Eh! ma chère, I have more faith in your countrymen and in the pistols they carry."

With such and similar remarks, she entertained herself for some time as we galloped on at full speed. Suddenly she grasped my arm, saying, with an ashen face, "Do you hear?"

I did hear. I was not too plunged in reverie to lose the sound which curdled my blood as well as hers. A low prolonged whistle came distinctly from a small thick wood on the right. The police were far behind, no habitation was near, and for some time we had not seen a creature on the road. The sound lasted for a couple of seconds, and was immediately answered by the crack of the postillion's whip. A slackening of speed took place. We looked at each other in speechless dismay, anticipating the arrival of our dreaded foes on the scene. The voice of François was next heard, loud and angry, and our course

continued as before. My attention, once diverted from myself, was given to the examination of the country, with a result far from reassuring. Rocks and bushes studded the near ground pretty thickly, high enough and large enough to conceal several individuals of a robber-band; and a line of hill, a few hundred yards off, was perforated with holes and small caverns, exactly the spot which such men would naturally choose for their operations.

No sooner had I come to this conclusion than a voice called "halt;" the carriage stood still, and one of the postillions passed the window. Thrusting out our heads, one on each side, Madame Duval and I endeavoured to ascertain what was going on. The postillion was not visible, perhaps he was concealed by the carriage or by a turn the road suddenly made at that point. Presently he reappeared, holding up a horse-shoe as he went by, saying at the same time, it was unlucky to leave old iron behind. The detention, short as it was, seemed an age to us, while visions of craped faces, stilettoes, and pistols formed a prominent part of our expectations. The voice of François, and the sharper tones of the other postillion urging him to accelerate his movements, revived us a little, and after a further short delay, we were off again at the same rapid pace as before. Was the story of the old iron a true superstition with him, or had he intended to betray us, being only prevented by the accidental presence of the other postillion? It was difficult to say. The latter might have been the case, as by his manœuvre a recommendation to keep off or some other intelligence might easily have been conveyed to a concealed accomplice. Some of these attacks on the road proceeded not from persons whom we should call professed robbers, but idle men in league with the postillions and ostlers.

The remainder of this, the most dangerous part of the road, was soon travelled, and with feelings of relief we hailed our approach to the next post-station. But what had

happened? The small village was all in a stir. Men and women were crowding round the door of the little hostelry, which was also the post-house, and children thronged the street. An empty carriage, without horses, declared by Madame Duval to be the one that left Viterbo half an hour before us, was by the way-side. The windows were closed, the blinds down, and there was a small amount of baggage behind, which had no appearance of having been disturbed. Talking, shouting, and gesticulating—the usual expression of feeling among an Italian crowd—was going on, a very Babel of harsh and eager sounds, accompanied by savage looks directed towards the house. To this day I do not know against whom their anger was expressed.

Our horses were no sooner taken out, than François and the postillions were in the midst of the throng. "What is the matter, François?" I asked, as soon as I could attract his attention.

Raising a face pale and agitated, he immediately approached. "The carriage of those gentlemen who left Viterbo this morning has been attacked by robbers, and one of them has been shot."

"Dead!" I gasped out the monosyllable.

"No; only wounded, but very badly."

"Which?—the tall one?" My breath came and went so quickly I could hardly articulate.

"Yes, the tall one, the one who recommended me to have four horses and endeavour to overtake them."

"Open the door!" was all I had power to utter.

François did as he was bid, though evidently surprised at my emotion, and followed me through the crowd, which at first gave way very reluctantly. A voice rose, "Give place, give place to the Signora, she is a relation;" and a man waving his arms in opposite directions soon cleared a path for me to the door. Here was another detention. A few men—privileged persons it appeared—were in the small

passage, and two gendarmes stood before a door on the right, from whence came the hum of voices.

"The mayor is there examining the servant and postillion about the attack," said François, pointing to the room before which the police kept guard.

I looked around. No other entrance was visible; so, trusting to instinct, I went up the dirty stone stairs facing me, and opened the first large door. It led into a good-sized square room, intended probably for an eating room, having long tables and uncomfortable-looking benches, with a door on each side. Selecting the best looking of the two, I turned the handle and entered. Before me, but with his back to the entrance, sat a gentleman, and I recognised the head and hair of Herbert. His coat had been removed, the shirt sleeve was turned up to the elbow, and a gentlemanlike Italian, whom I at once took to be a doctor, was binding up the wrist. Judging from the saturated handkerchiefs and the many drops upon the ground, the wound was not trifling, and had been attended with considerable loss of blood.

Though much alarmed, to my credit be it said, I did not scream, but sprang forward and knelt by his side. The strange doctor first looked up, but in another instant the patient slowly turned his face towards me, and then I found that the word of fond endearment, which, in spite of the chill so recently experienced, escaped me in that supreme moment of distress, had been addressed to Sir John Tredegar. Ashamed and saddened, I quietly rose from my knees, the Italian making me a sign to keep quite still, when a door opposite opened and Herbert himself entered. The guilty flush mantled over my face—cheek and brow crimsoning alike under his gaze of displeased surprise. Conscious of being where he least desired to see me—of having done what would most annoy and irritate him, I looked the culprit I felt myself to be, and wished, all too late, that I had exercised caution and self-control, instead of rushing

on to action at the suggestion of strong but heedless impulse.

Taking me by the hand, or rather wrist, for there was no clasp, no joining of hand to hand, only a firm hold which I could not have shaken off had I tried, he led me silently from the room and down the stairs. "Take my arm through this crowd." He said this as we reached the outer door, where the people were assembled, and gazed upon us with unrestrained curiosity. I did so mechanically, without a word, my legitimate support was nothing more to me. A woman almost immediately forced her way towards us, pressing near me with her rags and dirt, and, as is the common practice among Italian beggars, sought to move my compassion by thrusting her maimed arm in my face. I screamed involuntarily; Herbert clasped me closer to him, and waved her away, angrily. Instinctively, the chivalry of the gentleman prevailed over his personal displeasure. He conducted me to the carriage, some of the crowd making way as before, and bidding François wait a few minutes, he entered it after me.

"Madame Duval, the friend of my girlhood when at Brighton," was my answer to the inquiring glance directed towards my companion.

He bowed, and his manner relaxed; the old fascinating smile flitted across his countenance as he said, with a sweet intonation of voice peculiar to him, "Permit me to say a few words to my wife. Not being able to find another place so convenient, I must ask your kindness to bear the unpleasant situation in which I am compelled to put you." As he spoke he seated himself opposite me, and protected us from any prying observers by pulling down the blind. "Now, Una," he began, calmly, "why do you persist in conduct which you know must annoy me? Surely, it is inconsistent with the delicacy of womanhood to hunt me up in this way."

I was staggered; this was such a new light to me, who

thought I had done what every wife under the same circumstances would do. With a natural, yet, as it turned out, a foolish impulse, I had forgotten that my services might be unacceptable, or that by coming forward and attracting the attention of his friends, I irritated my husband's foible. The thought that pain and suffering were his portion, scattered both prudence and resentment to the winds—he was again to me the first object of regard, the one being on whom had centred the passionate enthusiasm of my girlish love, and without reasoning or reflection I had hastened to take my place at his side.

"I beg your pardon," was my answer.

He looked hard at me, surprised, I think, at my brevity and apparent calmness, for I sat still, ensconced in the corner, with my veil, rather a thick one, lowered, so as to conceal my countenance. He was leaning forward, so near, so quiet, that I might have touched him; nay, had I been so minded, I might have twined my arms around his neck and whispered in his ear a wish for reconciliation. That hour was passed, no such inclination sprang out of the bitterness I was then feeling. My affection towards him had received its death-blow at last. Flickered it had recently, like an expiring lamp, now kindling with a flame bright as ever for a moment, and now subsiding into darkness.

"It appears that we are going over the same ground," said Herbert, after waiting to give me an opportunity of adding to my laconic sentence. "It must be understood that neither my friends nor I shall again be subjected to these semi-tragic scenes—neither they to be disturbed, nor I to be made ridiculous by these unexpected and explosive *rencontres*."

"The meetings were accidental," I replied.

He smiled an incredulous smile, which would have provoked me had I been less sick at heart.

"You are on your way to Rome?" he said. I assented.

"Where do you go next?"

"I don't know."

"Exactly; so I thought. Now listen to me. I do not ask if any one advised you to take this step, knowing too well that your favourite counsellor is your own fancy; but I tell you plainly it is repugnant to me, and in every way disagreeable that you should follow me about the Continent. If you persist, it will be at your own risk—at the risk of having your feelings hurt—yes, entirely disregarded. If ever we are to be good friends again, it will not be by your opposing my wishes and setting my will at defiance. Remember, I have warned you."

We had wandered far from the real object I had in view. Chafed and angry as he was, a request for the restoration of Percy was not likely to meet with consideration unless I could first convince him that the meeting at Viterbo was unpremeditated; the second more easily explained itself. Very glad I was not to have yielded to the impulse of excitement, which in Florence had prompted me to return to Pisa in search of him. Knowing that the interview must necessarily be short, and wise enough to feel that a promise would serve me better than a disclaimer, I said, with tolerable self-possession, considering how much I had at stake—

"I will not cross your path again if I can avoid it; I will go wherever you like—return to England—settle myself wherever you please—only—only——" I vainly tried to steady my voice—it quavered so much I was almost afraid to go on—"only give me back Percy, for I am sometimes more lonely than I know how to bear!"

"Give you back Percy!" he repeated, drawing himself up with an air that seemed to say I had asked something quite out of the question. "I cannot see how I am to do that. My mother has undertaken the charge of him, and will not be willing to part with him."

"I am Percy's mother, and have the first claim!" I could not help the proud, defiant tone of my words. Find-

ing that his careless, easy temper had become rigid and inflexible. I was desperate—inclined to do battle for the possession of my child with all the fierce energies of passion.

"My memory does not furnish me with any particular maternal solicitude on your part when you had him with you."

This was pointedly said, and struck home, crushing at once the tower of strength I fancied was on my side. My darling boy, if not neglected, had often been overlooked, having occupied but a secondary place among the precious things in which my heart had sought its happiness. Alas! for me, the reproach was partly merited, though hard to bear from that quarter.

"I cannot make any change," said Herbert, decisively. "He is well cared for where he is, and my mind is satisfied about him while I am absent from England. Besides, his grandmother is so fond of him."

The cool way in which he left me out almost drove me frantic. I had been a careless, but never an unkind mother, and now the repelled affection hitherto flowing in another channel was longing to centre itself on my child.

"And am not I fond of him?" I vehemently asked, "I who, with life still young, have nothing else to love, who feel that the springs of joy which bless the lot of many other women are dried up or denied to me? Faulty I have been, faulty I still am, for it is the power, not the will, which is wanting to resent the sorrow and humiliation you inflict upon me; but look at home, Mr. Elmore! look at home, and reflect how you are about to exercise the authority which God and man have put into your hands. Does your conscience bear witness that you are acting with a pure, paternal judgment? Has vindictiveness no part in your determination? What account will you have to give hereafter, if you drive a broken-hearted mother to despair?"

I was in such a passion of excitement that I might have

said a good deal more had I not been recalled to prudence by seeing him first shrug his shoulders, and then assume an attitude of patient resignation, as if waiting till the storm had exhausted itself. Feeling that I was damaging my cause by such impetuosity, I stopped, and then said more quietly, "I am willing to return to England immediately."

"That would not be of the slightest use. Nothing short of my personal interference would induce my mother to resign her grandchild; writing would be unavailing. I shall not be at the Beeches before the autumn."

"The time is long to wait," I said; "but, like other dreary days, it will pass at last. I will be patient if you only promise to let me have him then."

"I feel him to be safer where he is," he answered, doggedly; "who is to assure me that you will not desert him again?"

"Your life abounds with too many pleasures to be able to estimate the loneliness of mine," I answered.

Either my words or manner moved him, for he turned away his head and irresolutely occupied himself with the blind.

It was not to be expected that I should accept denial, and this, the last opportunity I might ever have of speaking for myself. My little Percy!—his sweet smiles and pretty ways came soothingly before me—I would not be refused. Besides, I had done nothing to forfeit a mother's privilege—nothing which ought to entail on me the heavy punishment of continued separation from an only child. I could not submit.

"Herbert," I began—even now I can hear the trembling voice which faltered out the words—"are you sure that I deserve all the harshness with which you are treating me? Whatever my offences have been, is there not a spot where just retribution ends and resentment begins? You cast me off—I am resigned—I make no appeal against your decision. In a moment of passion and jealousy I deserted my home,

and that home-life, which is every good woman's glory and appropriate sphere, has slipped away from me. I know also that I can only recover it at your pleasure. The attempt I made to propitiate you failed, for you returned my letter unopened, and went away resolved to hold no communication with me. My next step, according to Mr. Slater, had your approbation. I went to Brooke Hall, and remained there till February, when I left it on account of failing health, recommended by Joshua Pinnoch, as well as Mr. Slater, to travel, until your return to England should give them an opportunity of interceding for the recovery of Percy. My future plan of life was to be dependent upon the success of their application. The first meeting at Viterbo was accidental; its suddenness depriving me of self-control, instead of pacifying, I irritated you;—neither that nor the second scene at the hotel will ever occur again. I thought you were wounded, and under the impulse of that anxiety, forgot that my presence would be so unwelcome. Have no uneasiness on that point—I shall never forget it again."

Ah me! I felt so keenly that the words were pronounced with a sting that threatened to undo all the good accomplished by the preceding explanation, for he had ceased to look stern and was bending forward, ready to speak when I should give him the opportunity. Aware of the mistake I had made, I soon regretted it, and would not give him the chance to reply without endeavouring to efface the last impression. My spirit was becoming weak and easily subdued. Yet I had one more weapon to use, and would not consider myself vanquished until that had been tried.

"What you may deny to the wife and mother, you may not to the daughter. My father was a kind friend to you," I urged. "Could he now stand between us, what would be his request for his child? Would he say, 'She is so faulty, she must not be forgiven—punish her—strike where the blow falls heaviest—have no pity, though she is a

woman, and young and foolish—spare her not, for she did wrong—let her pay the full penalty, to the very uttermost'? —or would he join in my small, but natural petition, to have my little one restored to me?"

To my great vexation, the large tears came rolling down my cheeks and fell upon my lap; this reference to my dear father unnerved me altogether. Unable to say more, I sat waiting for his answer, furtively dashing away the heavy drops I could not check, but which, I hoped, the thick folds of my veil would conceal.

His first words, "I can do nothing for you," fell on my heart like lead, until he added. "Whilst I am abroad I have charged my mother on no account to part with Percy during my absence; and you and I know her well enough to be sure that she will not go counter to her own inclinations without stringent cause. No written request will have any influence with her. Wait patiently till the autumn. As soon as I reach England, you shall have your boy on two conditions, first that you take him where I appoint, and forward an account of his health to the Beeches every month; next——" here was some hesitation, I think he was ashamed of the restriction, for he made a kind of apology for it—"next that you do not leave Rome under a fortnight for Naples or any other place. I must protect both myself and friends from these unpleasant scenes."

The conditions being by no means difficult, I immediately signified my willingness to accept them.

A silence ensued, broken by Herbert, asking, "Have you anything more to say?"

"No."

"Then you need not be detained longer. Your men and horses are, I see, equally impatient to be off."

After a short apology to Madame Duval—who had been trying to leave us to a *tête-à-tête* the greater part of the time by leaning half her person out of the window watching the crowd—he motioned François nearer, and bade him open

the door, saying, as he did so, "The dangerous part of the road is now over; there is no more cause for fear."

Then getting out, he closed the door himself, gently putting back my dress that it might not catch, and advised François to start without delay.

Unsatisfactory as the interview was as a whole, I had gained in part. I had justified myself from the suspicion of having followed him, and had obtained the promise of Percy. The fever of my spirit was so far allayed, that all suspense was over. I had the certainty of my husband's continued indifference, and had no more illusions to nurse. I was never more to cherish the hope of being sheltered by his love or sustained by his strength. He had thrust me away with unpitying hands, and made me feel that he had no regard for me—not a fragment. I was an obstacle to his enjoyment, and was to keep out of his path. Was it surprising that, stifling regret for my own share in our alienation with the bitterness of humiliation, I dwelt upon the careless selfishness which had provoked me? In my most repentant moods, I was not so romantic as to take all the blame to myself. I had sharpened rather than planted the thorns. By fits of temper and constant reproach, I had fretted and irritated him until he learnt to look upon his freedom as a comfort. Yet even in acknowledging my own faults, I imputed some to him. The first offence was his—he had not loved me, nor cared either to receive or comprehend the passionate tenderness of my disposition.

We had now met without any exchange of good wishes—we parted with no token of good-will. And this was the idol I had set up to love so fervently and unwisely! Henceforth our lives were severed—our paths were to be different. We were not to meet, or, if accident again threw us together, we were to meet as strangers. Any show of sensibility would, in his eyes, be enacting a scene. Our altar ties were broken, easily as a silken thread—the holiest union permitted to the family on earth was remorselessly destroyed.

Neither of us had entered into the religious character of the bond, nor could I expect Herbert to feel the inviolability it enjoined, when it was his pleasure to break it. As is usual, when woman strives with her master she is the loser, and must submit. On this occasion, to do Herbert justice, he had not been altogether unkind. He had granted the only request I made. For some time—I knew not how long, no period being specified—I was to have my little Percy. I should feel the clasp of his little arms around my neck, and teach him to lavish on me his childish love.

As our carriage moved away, I saw Herbert slowly returning to the inn, the now diminished crowd making a passage for him to the door. His eyes were cast down as if in deep thought; had our interview touched and softened him? I could not hope it, for the next minute they were raised to the window of his wounded friend, who was more to him than the heart-aching woman whom the world called his wife. A memory of my lost father, my absolute loneliness, swept over me, not to soothe, but to harden, and I was not afraid to make a vow, never by word or sign to seek a reconciliation, nay, I even made the resolution that if the holding up of my hand would bring it about, I would not do it! In the first gush of mortification I was reckless, listening only to the promptings of anger and resentment.

"You have had an interesting specimen of a matrimonial *tête-à-tête*—not exactly turtle-doves," observed I to Madame Duval, as we proceeded on our way. "My husband does not distinguish himself by tenderness."

These last words were said with caustic irony, and I was not a little provoked when she received them with the remark, "I have known many worse men than he."

"Yes," I replied bitterly; "he never struck me with the hand; that would be ungentlemanlike, and bring him under the ban of society. His code only permits those less tangible unkindnesses, which lacerate a woman's feelings and destroy her peace."

My companion was silent, wisely concluding that in my present mood I was best left to myself. She was right. Any observation made at that time would have been construed into opposition, and opposition I could not then bear.

After a while the storm of passion subsided; I roused myself from a state of universal dissatisfaction into one of a more personal character, and consequently likely to be more profitable. Visions of Ellen and her happy home flitted before me. It was the abode of love, kindness, and gentleness—of responsibilities acknowledged and fulfilled—a family where God's presence was daily felt and His law honoured. How different from ours, where we had been a law unto ourselves, or, at best, had taken the opinion of society for our guide. Alas! results cannot be annihilated. Those I was now lamenting had sprung up in their natural order. I had sown the wind, must I not expect to reap the whirlwind? Happily, I was young and sorrowful—paradoxical, yet true. The ground disturbed and ploughed by earthly disappointments, is sometimes capable of receiving a good seed, which bears a better fruit than prosperity can sow. Some can only learn the solemn truths which put eternity before time, the next world before the present, spiritual questions before earthly interests, by passing this life in shadow! "A hard saying, who can hear it?" Yet many seal the testimony with personal experience. There are some—perhaps many—who, looking back from the border land of maturity, or from the last stage in life's journey, old age, can echo David's words, so incomprehensible to others, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted."

Una Elmore was not the first, nor will she be the last, to learn that trial may be productive of good, that the sweetest flowers often spring up where the iron ploughshare has furrowed the deepest, shedding a rich and unexpected fragrance of hope and peace where gloom and sadness once abounded.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE ETERNAL CITY.

ROME! St. Peters!"—so exclaimed Madame Duval, and awoke me from a long reverie. Yes, there was the noble cupola glittering in the sun. We were fast approaching the city I so longed to see—called by travellers and poets the Eternal City, though no other in the universe has had its doom so often canvassed and its end predicted. Rome, in her majestic desolation, sitting like a dethroned queen among her ruins, had early taken a strong hold upon my imagination. Fain would I have visited it under other circumstances, and have drawn upon the excitability of my temperament for the moods most suitable to enjoy it. Facts had now taken the place of fancies. I was in truth a pilgrim, a homeless wanderer, and likely to find much in harmony with my mournful spirit in a place where the future is overshadowed by the past. Sorrow closes the heart, but happily not the intellect. I must be for ever grateful that one or two intellectual chinks were open, through which a few rays of interest crept into my brain. The cells of knowledge, if small at first, are elastic, and communicate so well with one another that progress is easy, and the attempt to enlarge them satisfactory.

My school-days' lore, scant and meagre as it was, came to my aid, and made me feel that "a little learning," contrary to the sarcasm of the poet, might be a good rather than "a dangerous thing." Pope intended the arrow for us; he liked to be bitter on women when he could—possibly in revenge for his want of those exterior graces which women

are supposed to estimate too highly. So long as a little learning is a nucleus for more to gather round, and not a platform from whence to make an exhibition, even a small quantity has a definite value. In the absence of large gifts, diminutive ones are not to be despised. Many weary-hearted sisters with only power enough to lift the eye to merit in admiration, without the frailest chance of imitating it, have had cause to rejoice in their appreciative perceptions, finding them avenues of enjoyment which would have been lost to duller and sluggish minds. True, this is not woman's most appropriate sphere. To love and be loved is the eternal requisite of her nature; but here, too, the rule of intelligence has an important place, and, when wanting or misapplied, allows disorder and dissension to mar the happy home-life, that nearest approach to bliss below we are permitted to enjoy, whatever may be the character of the bond. A happy home is the brightest possession in the world, the dearest spot on earth, the heart's garden, where the cultivated flowers of affection and kindness yield a rich and enduring perfume. Who has it has one of the sweetest influences at work around him to make him holier and happier. Deal gently with those who have it not, even though many kind charities may be wanting, for what warmth or light can radiate from a cold and gloomy hearth?

The turn of the road which brought the dome of St. Peter's and the high tower of the Castle of St. Angelo into view, calling forth Madame Duval's tone of enthusiasm, offered little realisation of the bright anticipations I had accustomed myself to indulge. Nothing else of any importance was to be seen—no grand view, no gigantic ruin, nothing to announce our proximity to the "lone mother of dead empires, the steps of broken thrones and temples, the world at our feet as fragile as our clay."

With no object in particular to attract, scarcely anything to interest, except the bare fact that we were approaching the spot where cluster so many memories stretching into

grey antiquity and rich in classical associations, we advanced along a straight road between walls, where now and then was a glimpse of some villa with a garden behind it. The Porta del Popolo was passed, and we were safe in Rome at last. The broad Piazza, flanked on one side by the Pincian Hill, of modern as well as ancient fame, was striking enough, but the narrow streets in which we were soon involved destroyed the potency of the anticipated charm. Disappointment is undoubtedly the most distinct impression produced on the minds of those who enter on this side. Arriving from Naples it is otherwise. The eye revels at once in ruins, broken columns, and despoiled tombs, besides delighting itself in those venerable tints which leave so much to the imagination. By taking the mind back into a past clouded with mystery or uncertainty, fancy clothes it almost according to her will, and adds romance to grandeur and majesty. But here there were no ruins to excite, and we began our acquaintance with Rome by a near view of her narrow, crooked, and dirty streets.

The Corso, the best and largest, beginning at the Porta del Popolo, and running in a direct line to the Capitol, is scarcely wider than to admit of two carriages abreast, and bears no comparison with the thoroughfares of other capitals. The streets are also dark, with many outlets, disagreeable to the pedestrian and almost impossible to the *flaneur*, as vehicles, suddenly issuing from some little square, or rounding a corner unexpectedly, take the unwary by surprise, and bring them in danger both of life and limb. Yet when this is said, we must turn to the other side of the picture. A spot so unique, so separated from the present, soon reknits the broken threads of expectation. No other city can boast of so much, for the attractions below the surface add their claims to those above. There is not only the history written on its walls and monuments, but the very bowels of the earth are fraught with interest, and from time to time enrich the traveller's diary with something new. Some long-

forgotten tomb, or Columbarium with "storied urns," yet filled with ashes, buried jewels, and other remnants of a departed age, are occasionally brought to light.

Rooms having been secured in one of the principal hotels, we were soon comfortably installed, and the next day, after breakfast, impatient to begin our acquaintance with the old city, we made a few exploring steps in the Via Condotti and to the Piazza di Spagna. There our first attention was arrested by Beppo, the wide-famed beggar of the Pincian Hills.

For the benefit of those to whom he is unknown, let it be said, he is a dwarf without legs, or with none visible, a fine torso, who goes about on castors, and acts as if the lord of that princely flight of steps uniting the Piazza with the promenade below. There he levies contributions on the passers-by, and is so successful that he keeps a servant and a donkey, rides backwards and forwards night and morning to his beat, and not long before the time of which I write, gave his daughter a dowry of 200 scudi on her marriage. These details respecting the wealthy beggar were learned later; at this moment I only saw a queer little object, and had the uncomfortable feeling of being pursued by it, and so quickly that there was no escape. Brought to bay, I faced my pursuer, and found in the poor cripple that had frightened me the courteous bearing of a gentleman. Lifting his hat with a grace beyond his appearance, he bows and smiles upon the astonished stranger, aiding his silent solicitations by a look of expectancy upon his pleasing and handsome face. Every one knows Beppo, and most people give him a trifle, although many are aware that he is of good family and possessed of great natural abilities, yet deliberately choses the profession of mendicancy for its idleness and lucrativeness!

Going upstairs on our return to the hotel, we were preceded by a little, grey figure, whose identity there was no mistaking.

"Mrs. Ewing!" "Mrs. Elmore!" were our mutual ex-

clamations, followed by an embrace, which, considering its cordiality and the short time we had known each other, must have owed its spontaneousness to those subtle links of sympathies which bind together diverse and differing members of humanity in unpremeditated bonds. Then came a string of questions and answers :

"When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday."

"Did you meet with any adventure?"

"Nothing particular."

"But there was a report of an attack made upon some travellers yesterday, and of one gentleman having been wounded."

Not wishing then to acknowledge my connection with the travellers, because fearful of exciting more curiosity than I was prepared to gratify, I suffered the subject to drop. So careful was I on this point, that throughout our journey "Madame Duval and friend" had been always inscribed in the hotel books.

"I am truly rejoiced that you got here safely. There are rumours that the roads are no longer safe—some truth in them perhaps, but exaggerated as those things usually are," said Mrs. Ewing, bustling forward and chattering away, without noticing my silence. "Alice is still blind, still not to be persuaded. I don't think she cares for the Prince, only likes to have her own way. Come in!—come in!" and quick in her movements as in her articulation, the little lady, while speaking the last words, opened a door we had just reached, and brought us full in view to the occupants of the room. "Girls! girls! here is my kind friend, Mrs. Elmore."

Mrs. Ewing advanced a little and then stepped aside. Her introduction did not quite suit the situation. A beautiful, delicate girl was standing by a fire, which seemed rather out of place, for the blinds were carefully excluding a glorious sun, whose rays would have more effectually warmed the room than any artificial heat.

By her side was a middle-sized, dark young man, whose swarthy complexion and flashing eyes marked him for an Italian. Though not handsome, he was gentlemanlike and pleasing, a likely man enough to captivate an impulsive, unreflecting maiden. This was Prince Pietro Colunna di Voltri, a high-sounding name until dissected, when you learned that the one apparently connecting him with one of Italy's proudest nobles was conferred by sponsorial interposition.

But the call for "the girls" still puzzled me, and did not become clearer when a lady of mature age, appearing in the doorway of an inner room, was named by Mrs. Ewing as her niece, "Mrs. Leeson." A comely dame she was, notwithstanding that her dimensions were too magnified to admit the idea of grace and beauty. The complexion was clear and fresh, and her round face had an expression of easy good humour which prepossessed me in her favour. But by what stretch of imagination could I class her among "the girls" called upon to welcome me? Such a notion of girlhood on the part of Mrs. Ewing was an idiosyncrasy which inclined me to laugh. Though a period often indefinitely prolonged, as the domestic vocabulary of families sometimes ludicrously admits, it has its limits. Her own more than sixty summers—the word is chosen advisedly, for nothing wintry had touched the agile lady except the snows which Time had laid upon her head—maintaining still a difference between her own age and forty-five, kept her probably ignorant of the inappropriateness of the term. With this mental explanation of the incongruity I had barely succeeded in checking my mirth, when all reasoning was dispersed by another vision.

Mrs. Leeson was followed by a young girl, who attracted me immediately. Her small, regular features were not particularly striking at first sight—far less so than those of the brilliant girl by the fire, yet the eye involuntarily sought her face more than that of the other. It was so calm, so sweet, that it was reposing to look upon. The lightest

breath of sorrow might perchance have touched her, though that was doubtful, but nothing more. So deep was her expression of serenity that no passion of thwarted will, or eager desire, or any strong emotion, appeared as yet to have disturbed it. Her soft, dovelike eyes looked so kindly at me that, young as she was—not more than seventeen—my heart was won at once. This was Mary Rivers, an orphan niece of Mrs. Leeson and grand-niece to Mrs. Ewing, whom circumstances afterwards attached to me in some of the most important portions of my life.

Once more I met Herbert, and again accidentally. Going down the flight of steps leading to the Piazza di Spagna, about two days after our arrival, I perceived him and Sir John Tredegar coming up, the latter looking pale and tired, carrying one arm in a sling and leaning on Herbert with the other. My first impulse was to turn back, the next to continue my course. Sir John, as is often the case with persons in weakness, looked downwards—Herbert upwards. He might not recognise me, my veil being down, besides, others were on the steps at the same time, and Madame Duval, who would at once have established my identity, remained a little behind. Whether he did or not, here was the opportunity to act in accordance with his wishes, and to show that neither he nor his friends had anything to fear from what he was pleased to call my "explosive *rencontres*." As I chose to pass close by him, I did so without raising my eyes, and after descending a few steps, stood still, and waited for my companion to join me. He looked back. If he had had any doubt who I was, the uncertainty was quickly removed by the appearance of Madame Duval, whose salutation he was obliged to return. Again he glanced behind him. Madame Duval said that he looked back three times before he was out of sight. Whether my behaviour met with his approbation or not, I could not tell; I only know it did not increase my happiness.

Ever and ever turns the wheel which we in the heathen

instincts of superstition term Destiny. On my arrival in Rome, I had no intention of entering society. Mr. Norris' distinctly-expressed disapprobation of my visit made me alive to the difficulties in which I might be placed, and yet I had not been there long before I was forced out of my retirement. The small kindness I had been able to show Mrs. Ewing having procured me an introduction to the Leesons, Alice, more impulsive than myself, soon conceived such a liking for me, that I was drawn into an intimacy I never contemplated. This spoilt darling of her mother was never thwarted or contradicted. She had been long in Rome, and was greatly admired. Nearly every evening it was her pleasure to collect in her salon a numerous assembly —distinguished as well as humbler guests—all whom she fancied, whether their merits were real or imaginary. British, French, American, Italian, priests or laymen, all received a welcome if they pleased either her taste or her caprice. She was beautiful as well as rich, and had talent enough to retain the admiration she generally inspired. A card to Mrs. Leeson's receptions had been a distinction all the past winter. Alice was the star, and it must be owned that her mother loved to have it so, and found, or thought she found, in that fact a recompensing gratification for her maternal cares. Alice was really lovable in some things, and generally fascinating even to Mrs. Leeson herself, though she brooked no opposition and ruled her parent with an imperious will, which taught me to reflect a little upon my own character. No precept, whether for encouragement or warning, is so telling as example.

Little by little I was withdrawn from the seclusion I thought so prudent, induced to take part in these entertainments, and brought into contact with strangers. What I began reluctantly I soon tolerated and ended by liking. For some, novelty has a powerful attraction ; it had for me, so far at least as anything could have at that time. It was interesting to hear the visitors discuss what they had seen

in the day, and what they were going to see on the morrow; hear the adventures more or less piquant which they had to relate; and above all, the Pope's name, like a household word affixed to some anecdote, passing familiarly from mouth to mouth. To me he was the Pope; he bore the name without the gilding; and it sounded strange to hear him mentioned with open reverence as the Holy Father, or his Holiness.

Mrs. Ewing's visits were restricted to the morning. She did not live in the hotel, nor take any part in the mixed society of the evening. It need scarcely be said that she had utterly failed in her attempt to break off the engagement between Alice and Prince Pietro, although assisted in her efforts by Mrs. Leeson's only brother, who, equally with herself, disapproved of the marriage. To all their representations Alice turned a deaf ear, and held her own against them with unwavering pertinacity, her mother not venturing to oppose. She was of age, and, unhappily, had a large fortune at her own disposal.

"I will please myself on a point so personal, if I never do on any other," observed Alice to me, after a confidence respecting the opposition of her relatives. "Am I not right?"

It was a searching question. How could I, who, in a similar manner had made shipwreck of life's happiness, uphold her in the wilful spirit she was cherishing, or, conscious as I was, presume to advise her against it?

"Are you much attached to this foreign prince?" I asked in answer.

"Comme ça," she said, with an expressive shrug of her shoulders. "We often quarrel, but, as yet, not seriously. I like him better than any one else. He never bores me. My stiff uncle calls him a freethinker, and dislikes him, as if a man were answerable for his belief! My dear little old aunt's disapprobation has perhaps still less weight with me," she added, with a saucy smile. Her aunt's peculiarities were often a subject of ridicule to her.

Though sufficiently wise to see the fallacy of her statement, I was not strong enough to overthrow it. I thought we were answerable for our belief, but instead of contending for the point, I asked, "What does Mrs. Leeson say?"

"Oh, mamma knows better than to interfere. Aware that excitement is injurious to my health, she is too prudent to oppose my wishes. I know very well that Uncle Ernest thinks Prince Pietro is attracted by my fortune, but if he is, it is not the only thing," and the bright girl glanced triumphantly towards the mirror.

How differently she and I viewed the same question! she *en philosophe*, and I —— for the first time I envied Alice Leeson. And yet the glass before us made me painfully suspicious that insidious disease might even now be lurking under that exquisite transparent complexion. Poor girl! In that very delicacy which alarmed me, she found excuses for her wilful resistance to the wishes of her elders, and working out of it a convenient cloak for the indulgence of her self-will, perversely allowed herself to drift out of the reach of kindness or beneficial counsel. Unhappily I could not give her my experience, and to preach the misery arising from ill-assorted wedlock would have been in this instance, as in so many others, absolutely vain. It is an unerring law that the most profitable lessons must be gathered from seeds of our own sowing.

A few evenings after my introduction to this family, Mrs. Leeson had one of those large receptions I afterwards found so agreeable. The coyness felt at first soon gave place to amusement as guest after guest arrived and conversaton grew in interest, ranging about various topics, most of them fresh or new to me. An unexpected observation startled me at once into an attentive listener.

"Another robbery has taken place on the road. Really the Holy Father's highways are the least secure in Europe", said a lady near me, addressing a gentleman who looked

like an Italian priest, and who was standing in the midst of a group to whom he seemed well known.

"Madam, I find this salon has dangers more formidable than the roads," was the reply, in good English.

The lady addressed was handsome and rather young; she had the good taste to give his remark a political interpretation, and to leave it to the gentleman to answer.

"But how is it that these things happen so frequently?" asked the lady, when able to obtain the Italian's attention again.

"What things, madam? Something is always occurring. The day is made up of hours, and hours of minutes, every one of which must receive a touch from the wings that pass over them. You know that those of Time are never folded."

The lady was not to be silenced. "Your country is the very nursery of brigandage. How is it that you have no laws to punish these bold offenders? It does not say much in favour of ecclesiastical rule when travellers who go about this country must do so in fear of their lives."

"Life is very cheap here," observed a gentleman standing by.

"And opinions dear," said another.

"Not unless too loudly expressed," rejoined the Italian; "there is always indulgence for a voice properly modulated."

"Yet there sometimes comes a courteous recommendation to return home," laughed another.

"I have heard of no less than three attacks made lately upon travellers: one on the road to Naples, and two between Rome and Viterbo," said the lady, returning to the subject; "also that the mayor of the nearest village, where the travellers made their complaints, was a relative of Cardinal Antonelli, and yet did nothing for them. He would hardly condescend to hear their story; he might have the robbers punished if he would. His Eminence ought to be told of it."

"Relationship would not be much of a bond between the mayor of a poor village and the great statesman. I doubt his having much authority, and still more his chance of gaining his cousin's ear. By-the-bye," remarked the Italian, not unwilling, as it seemed to me, to change the subject, "did you ever hear how his Holiness acted at the beginning of his reign towards those whom his family recommended to his benevolence? He sent back the applicants with written instructions to say that, not requiring his paternal inheritance for himself, his share might be distributed among those they wished recommended to his notice! Not many of his relative's protégés troubled him afterwards."

"I wish to leave Rome, but am afraid," said another lady, joining in the conversation. "It is said that a well-known brigand has been seen in the neighbourhood. He will be at the head of the band."

"Exaggeration, madam," said the Italian, calmly. "You English dignify with the name of brigand every petty thief or scoundrel who has the audacity to obtain by force what is not lawfully his, if only he has a gun in his hand. As well call your London pickpocket a brigand as some of the raw material about here, who endeavour to play upon the fears of travellers, but whom a little determination soon puts to flight."

"There is something in that I must admit," observed a gentleman. "Three of my countrymen met with such an encounter the other day. One of them got wounded in the fray, but they made such a resistance that the fellows ran away, carrying off one of their number badly hurt, if nothing worse."

Though an attentive examination of the speaker proved him a stranger to me, he might not be so to Herbert, who had friends everywhere. But I needed not that link, finding the conversation already interesting enough to make me a willing auditor.

"How deeply dyed in deeds of bloodshed and robbery

must a man be in order to deserve the name of brigand?" asked another of the party. "Men who arrest you on the high road, with arms in their hands, are of a different class from our pickpockets in London. No, no; repudiate it as you will, this country must monopolise the rejected name."

The easy grace with which the urbane Italian received the banter of his companions surprised me, and made me think that he frequented these assemblies with an object.

"These spiritually-governed countries are not over pleasant to live in," said a voice in the circle.

"I am not sure that the spirituality deserves all the blame," observed another; "the exiled king may have something to do with it. Queer-looking fellows are seen lurking near the Quirinal. Bomba had brigands in his service—why may not his son inherit that policy as well as other virtues? Funds, however obtained, are necessary for the royal cause. They can be purified by sacerdotal benediction."

"Oh! my poor country! what will be said of her next?" exclaimed the Italian, shrugging his shoulders and raising his hands in apparent astonishment. Yet it struck me that he did not like the turn the conversation had taken.

"Your own people make no secret of such transactions having taken place. I happen to know——"

The fortuitous knowledge about to be detailed by the last speaker was lost to me, as my attention was just then withdrawn. A small hand touched me gently, and a pleasant voice whispered, "Aunt Leeson, thinking you know no one here, has sent me to bring you to her."

Lingering a moment I sought to catch the conclusion of the sentence Mary Rivers had interrupted. Too late; the thread was broken. I heard only some merry remarks at the expense of the ex-king, who, in his days of peril, at the approach of Garibaldi, sent telegraphic requests for the Pope's blessing. These, by highest authority, were flashed

along the line at stated intervals, with what result a speedy flight attested.

Conducted by Mary Rivers, I repaired to the other end of the large, well-filled room, and found Alice the admired centre of a group where a very different style of conversation was going on. At an involuntary exclamation on my part, a gentleman standing in front of her turned round, and I was face to face with Lionel Osborne. "You here?"

"And you too?" were the first words spoken. Then falling back, a little out of the circle, we sat down together.

"I saw Elmore yesterday. I did not know that you were with him," said Lionel.

Reading his mistake on my altered countenance, he changed the tenor of his words to—"Did you know that he was here?"

"I met him by chance at Viterbo, again on the road at a post-station where we stopped to make inquiries as to the cause of a great commotion and excitement going on. You know, I suppose, what had happened—that his carriage had been attacked by robbers, and one of his friends, Sir John Tredegar, was wounded."

"So he told me; but the hurt was not serious, he will soon be well again. They are going to Naples shortly in the yacht, now waiting for them at Civita Vecchia, and from thence to the Greek Islands."

Accidently I was made acquainted with my husband's summer plans, yet the intelligence only made me sick at heart—but wherefore? Distance could not separate us more than we were already separated. This perpetual revival of feelings and questions I wished to put away for ever, was trying, and checked the progress in resignation that I was beginning to make.

With Lionel there was at first some restraint, but as I never permitted any allusion to my isolated position, he soon overcame it, and became a useful addition to our party in our daily excursions.

The Holy Week was near at hand, offering much to see and do. Alice Leeson, delicate as she was, was the moving spirit. She had her programme, made up her parties, and generally insisted upon having my company.

Patience, reader! I will not tire you with a minute account of my life in Rome; I will only refer to those incidents which have a bearing on the domestic history intended to be portrayed.

The times then were more especially interesting, it being soon after the flight of Francis II. from Naples to Rome, where the Pope kindly received him, and appointed the Quirinal for his residence. Enthusiasm, kindled by the extraordinary successes of Garibaldi in favour of "il rè galantuómo," was at its height throughout Italy. Bands of the disaffected disturbed the streets at night with patriotic songs, crying for an united Italy, and not always encountering police to stop them. Placards to the same effect were found on the walls in the morning, and not immediately torn down. No strangers were allowed to visit the Capitol. The utmost permitted was to stand at the foot, in near neighbourhood to the equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius; but no one was permitted to ascend the noble steps, a report having obtained currency that some insidious enemy, under the guise of a foreigner, was to proclaim Victor Emanuel from the tower—King of all Italy. The prohibition extended to ladies also; they were feared as much as the men, and considered quite as dangerous in the character of conspiritors. Not long before our sojourn began, a lady had been seen to wave a white handkerchief from the summit, whether in a moment of harmless enthusiasm or merely in recognition to friends below, did not appear, and hence the order dictated by a feeble and jealous policy.

Vain precaution! For a little while the waves of progress were beaten back, but only to gather greater force. They rose and fell, advanced and receded, until, borne

onward by the overwhelming tide of circumstance and popular energy, they swept away one barrier after another, and carried the long-desired event to a successful issue. At this time, however, only enthusiasts talked of one united Italy, with Rome the capital; yet these political dreamers, judging from hearsay, formed a very respectable part of the population. The society in which the Leesons mixed talked of them, but not with particular approbation; they were more interested in what was actually taking place around them, which was not reassuring, especially for ladies alone. So many things combined to draw me closer to the Leesons and their set, inducing me to cultivate the acquaintance. Stories were continually circulated of gentlemen, when returning from evening entertainments, being waylaid on the dark staircases, relieved of their purses or studs, and otherwise roughly handled. People were afraid to ride late in the Campagna, or make distant excursions.

The explanation offered was that the wreck of the old Bourbon dynasty had disintegrated society downwards to a great extent, and added to the number of disreputable waifs scattered about the country—a class at all times sufficiently numerous.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOLY WEEK.

"TO the Sistine Chapel to-day—we shall hear Mustapha." This was the arrangement made by Alice Leeson, and no one thought of offering opposition. It was that day in the Holy Week when mass at the Pope's chapel in the Vatican was the general attraction. Nearly every stranger in Rome struggled to be present. This chapel being only open to the public on special occasions, the people flock in such numbers that all cannot effect an entrance.

Leaving our carriage at the place appointed, we made for the Vatican, and waited some time in the great hall—a cordon, defended by the Swiss Guard, barring the ascent of the staircase until the right moment should arrive. Meanwhile, the Guards themselves afforded some amusement. Tricked out in a fantastic garb, patched about with many colours—designated, in descriptive language, mediæval costume, but which to me appeared a ludicrous union of the mountebank and harlequin—these sturdy halberdiers kept back the troublesome throng with untiring good-humour. The word from above being given at last, the Scála Regia was open to the public. Then came the rush, to the imminent peril of the weak. There was a pushing, a struggling, a swaying from side to side as the stronger party prevailed on the right or on the left, with a constant fear of falling and the apprehension of being crushed or injured by the advancing pressure. Our party was separated. Alice and Prince Pietro managed for them-

selves, Madame Duval and Mary Rivers, Lionel and I, had to battle with the multitude.

The top of the staircase gained at last, we entered the Scála Regia, a spacious hall adorned with frescoes of Romish tradition, interesting enough, but it was not this we had come to see. Numbers were pouring into the Sistine Chapel, yet the halberdiers were especially provoking, turning back all who ventured to present themselves deviating in any perceptible manner from the dress prescribed. Overcoats, even of the clerical cut and colour, were an effectual obstacle, and the weather that day being cold and gloomy, many, ignorant of the stringent rule, had come so attired. One gentleman, more ingenious than the rest, after having been sent away, presented himself again with the front flaps of his surtout pinned into an awkward resemblance to a dress-coat, and was admitted! For ladies, admission was less difficult, even when unprepared, the black veil, which is easily arranged, being the chief requisite.

As we entered the large, lofty room, designated the Sistine Chapel, after Sixtus IV., who built it, a sea of heads closely packed together met the eye, and with no pleasing effect. The hair of the ladies was not in the neatest order, the hats of many having been hastily removed and concealed in some fold of the drapery. Nor did the gentlemen appear to greater advantage. An unbroken outline of features was not pleasing. The chapel even then was nearly full, and yet a numerous and vivacious crowd still struggled for entrance.

Committing me to an attendant, whose office it appeared to be to compress the ladies into as small a space as possible, Lionel vanished among a quantity of black figures ranged in regular lines.

The Miserere is rather a wearisome performance, though every one makes a point of hearing it. The mournful chanting, and the slow extinguishing of the lights on the

altar one after the other as each psalm ends, is tedious. I was beginning to tire, when the fine voice of Mustapha, the chief of the Pope's choristers, rose clear and distinct, sustaining a few notes awhile, and then echoing through the vaulted roof. Every breath was hushed as those peculiar tones reverberated through the chapel. What has become of him, or who has taken his place, I know not; voices like his do not last very long, yet no one who witnessed the religious ceremonies of that year and heard him in his prime, will forget Mustapha and his remarkable falsetto.

This week made so great a demand upon every one's time and energies, that Mrs. Leeson discontinued her receptions. Already they had acquired some interest for me, contrasting in variety with society at home. At the close of the day we were generally tired, Alice especially so, no counsel or entreaty being weighty enough to induce her to forego a pleasure she had resolved upon enjoying. This day had taxed her strength. Feeling unequal to the prolonged fatigue of the dinner below, where we were accustomed to form a small coterie, she dined upstairs, and persuaded me to join her.

The last fragments of the repast having been removed, we were sitting over the dessert, when the waiter, who had hardly closed the door, opened it again, saying, "A gentleman for Mrs. Leeson."

"Uncle Earnest! I never expected you to return so soon!"

These words, uttered by Alice in no very cordial tone, did not constitute a flattering welcome, nor was it improved by her manner, as the niece rose slowly from her chair and carelessly offered her forehead to the new comer.

"Mrs. Elmore, my best and dearest friend in Rome," said Alice, indicating me with a graceful gesture, "one whom I expect you to like very much for my sake, Colonel Palmer." This was said in a half-defiant, half-playful tone.

The visitor bowed stiffly, with little of the grace that had attracted me at our former interview. We had recognised each other at the first glance, and by an instinct, felt rather than explained, I knew that the strange lady met at Radicofani, lost ground in his estimation when converted into the friend of his niece. Alice provoked me by assigning to me so great an intimacy.

"I am happy to see that you arrived safely in Rome, and hope that you encountered no disagreeables on the road. Your friend was rather anxious."

I had no distinct idea what I meant to say, certainly not to reveal my connection with the accident that *did* happen. Whatever it was, it resolved itself into an incoherent reply, and sent the warm blood tingling to my cheeks; I did at last articulate, "She is very timid."

"One carriage was attacked the same day, and only left the hotel at Viterbo half an hour before Mrs. Elmore. She had a narrow escape," said Alice.

Colonel Palmer looked surprised, more I think at my awkward manner than at the circumstance Alice related. Not having acknowledged my acquaintance with the travellers, I never liked the subject and always tried to avoid it.

"I trust you had no cause for alarm?" said Colonel Palmer, and this time he waited for an answer.

"Cowards are always easily frightened," replied I, evasively.

Alice took up the subject: "There was an attack made upon another carriage a few days after Mrs. Elmore's arrival. The courier was stabbed, and a gentleman beaten by a set of men with crape over their faces, because, being paralysed, he was slow in giving up his money. How did you come, uncle? Did you meet with no adventure?"

"None whatever. Wishing to hasten my journey, I went from Florence to Civita Vecchia, and thence by rail to Rome. You seem disappointed."

"Rather," replied the saucy girl, "because you do not listen to my story, and you show no sympathy for those who suffered."

"I should have been very sorry had anything happened to your friend."

To be called Alice's friend by her uncle vexed me. I was very ungrateful.

The door opened to admit Mrs. Leeson and Mary Rivers, whose respective salutations—"Earnest!" "Uncle Earnest!" varied sufficiently in tone to disclose the feelings of the speakers. Mary Rivers was the favourite, and judging from the caressing manner in which her uncle's hand stroked her rich, sunny hair, she was very near his heart. In a few minutes I seized an opportunity to withdraw, leaving the family group together.

Madame Duval was a little disappointed that her *personnage* proved only a colonel and the uncle of Alice; and I was annoyed at being presented to him in a character which appeared to produce an unfavourable impression.

At an early hour the following morning Alice claimed my society for the day. Being known to not a few influential persons, she had a full complement of cards and tickets for the sights of the week, and good-naturedly offered some to me. I declined for that day, Lionel having engaged to accompany me and Madame Duval to St. Peter's, to hear the Pope deliver his benediction from the balcony. Just as we were about to start, Mary Rivers asked a seat in my carriage.

"Aunt and uncle, Alice and Prince Pietro, fill theirs. If you can only convey me to St. Peter's, Uncle Earnest will take care of me when there, and bring me home."

Gladly I acceded to her request, she being a secret favourite. Colonel Palmer was waiting at the place appointed for the dismissal of the carriages, and taking possession of Mary, remained with our party, while Mrs. Leeson accompanied her daughter and Prince Pietro.

The impressive scene of that day will not easily be forgotten. Continually increasing numbers began to congregate on the noble platform in front of the steps before the church. Lines of soldiers were drawn up in different parts of the large Piazza, and soon a vast crowd was assembled. Whatever the secret disaffection might be, Pope Pius then exercised his public functions with undiminished splendour. All eyes were directed to the balcony, or lóggia, where his Holiness was to appear. A few mitred bishops came and went, keeping attention alert, and then came a general hush of expectation. The vast multitude, soldiers and people, went down on their knees, raising upwards a sea of earnest, eager faces. The Pope, borne into the balcony on his portable throne, the gestoria, seemed immersed in white ostrich plumage, studded with the variegated eyes of peacock's feathers, intended to symbolise that he is the centre of vigilance. Madame Duval and Lionel knelt where they stood, but I followed Colonel Palmer and Mary, who, unwilling to join in the universal homage expected, or to offend by singularity, rapidly descended the steps and stood partly concealed behind a stone group at the bottom. Clear, musical, and ringing, rose the voice of Pius IX., as, with uplifted hand and beaming face, he invoked respectively the three persons of the Trinity and "all the holy apostles and saints" to bless the kneeling throng The sweet echoes had scarcely died away when the fans of the gestoria fluttered, the feathers waved to and fro for a second, and the Pope was borne away as rapidly as he came, glad enough, I imagine, to descend from the honours of his undulating throne; while, from below, arose a hubbub of voices, all the more overpowering from the great stillness of the previous minute.

"What an imposing scene!" observed I to my companions, in all good faith believing it so.

"Second, I suppose, to one on the plain of Dura, when all nations, tongues, and languages, fell down at the sound of

the dulcimer to worship the golden image which Nebuchadnezzar the king had set up," replied Colonel Palmer.

He had scarcely finished speaking, when I found myself separated and forced along with the tumultuous rush that was being made towards the door of St. Peter's, the ceremony of the washing of the pilgrims' feet being the next in rotation. The crowd swept on, and I with it, unable to resist. Fear soon increased to terror, as I heard a piteous cry from some one who had fallen. To turn and look for my friends was impossible. I must ascend the steps with the throng, or fall down and be trampled under foot. It was an anxious moment, for the crowd was strong and eager. With desperate courage I advanced a few steps, tripped, tottered, was roughly pushed, and fell against a stalwart man who was making his way with great success. "Have the kindness to protect that lady," I heard a friendly voice say, not far off, in tolerable Italian. What a change came over me! The fact of being watched over, even from a distance, by Colonel Palmer, calmed me immediately. With unhesitating confidence I took the stranger's arm, and was safely assisted up the flight of steps to the platform. Arrived there we waited. The Colonel and Mary soon joined us, when the former thanked my protector and took me under his care.

"Take my other arm, Mrs. Elmore; I am content on this occasion to be a *panier à deux anses*, as our witty neighbours say."

The rush was now diminished. Once inside the door, the dispersing multitude lost its alarming proportions, and the throng without decreased every moment.

"I hope you have no ornaments of value about you," said Colonel Palmer, as we approached the entrance. "In this demoralised city, thieves are as plentiful in churches as in the streets. Be on your guard."

The caution was barely uttered when I reached the inner leather door, which, to make ingress and egress easier, swung

to and fro. A man standing near threw his leg across the doorway, nearly tripping me up, when a woman, on the other side, snatched at my person, hoping to secure my watch and chain. The grasp laid on the shoulder of the first offender, judging from its effect, was no light one, for the man yelled and quivered under it, and moved away, casting on Colonel Palmer a look of deep but impotent anger.

Once within we were speedily joined by Lionel and Madame Duval. Merely taking a cursory view of some of the objects of interest, we proceeded up the grandly-proportioned nave to watch the devotees before the bronze statue of St. Peter, where priests and cardinals, in all the pomp of ecclesiastical paraphernalia, were then going through the ceremony of kissing the toe, with the same gravity and apparent faith as little children or the ignorant peasant.

Before the Holy Week closed, Lionel was summoned away: Lady Mayfort was seriously ill, and asked him to return.

"Tell her that mine is an unforgetting love, and ask for some kind message back," were my last words as he went away.

Very kind friends were about me, but my heart still yearned after her, the earliest and even yet the dearest I had known. Lionel promised, and would, I knew, keep his word. I could but hope that, in the dull hours of sickness, a portion of the old regard for me would be awakened, especially when she considered how soon my sunny hopes had become clouded and my youth made sorrowful. Dear Lady Mayfort! a few tender words from you at that time would have been very precious.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE COLISEUM.

"LET us see the Coliseum by moonlight!" This was Alice's proposition one mild day in April. Stimulated by an account of the pleasure derived from an expedition there the night before by a party from our hotel, she resolved to do the same. The temptation to see the noble ruin in the calm grandeur of that solemnising light was great. I joyfully consented—heedlessly, I may say, entirely forgetting that the delicacy of her health rendered such an undertaking imprudent. Before Mrs. Leeson was apprised of the intention, our evening arrangements were made.

"My darling child, you are not fit to bear the night air; you are already fatigued with your exertions during the Holy Week; do give it up," pleaded Mrs. Leeson.

"Dear mamma, you know I never give up anything I have set my mind upon," answered the wilful girl.

"Earnest, Alice is proposing to go out to-night to see the Coliseum by moonlight. Because the Everetts went yesterday, she has taken it into her head to go too. She will assuredly be ill afterwards. She has a cold already, and Dr. B —— strongly recommended her to be careful. Can you persuade her to stay at home?"

This was addressed to Colonel Palmer, who then entered, and the poor mother looked anxiously at her brother. Alice had gone into the next room, but overhearing Mrs. Leeson's appeal, returned, saying petulantly—

"Mamma would deprive me of every enjoyment if she could. I am qutie sure it will not hurt me to go out; the

nights are not cold. Besides, I do not care if it does—I intend to go."

A pained expression passed over the fine countenance of Colonel Palmer, as it often did when Alice contended with her mother, whose weak indulgence for so many years neutralised any sudden opposition.

"Is a trifling pleasure so very hard to give up?" asked Colonel Palmer, with mild gravity.

"I have set my heart upon it," returned Alice.

"Your mother's heart is set upon you and your well-being," remonstrated Colonel Palmer.

"I know it won't hurt me," persisted Alice. "Mrs. Elmore is going, and Madame Duval, and Mary; Prince Pietro is to meet us there. We have made up the party, and I will not disappoint them."

This was in her mind conclusive, for she turned away without deigning to notice her uncle's answer—"If you are thinking of your friends, I will willingly go in your stead."

Alice was not to be dissuaded. Equally useless was my offer to give up the expedition altogether. Prince Pietro approving, as he always did, of every arrangement made by his betrothed, there was no assistance to be obtained from him. Mrs. Leeson finding her daughter resolute, withdrew her opposition, and vented her maternal anxieties in incessant recommendations to take plenty of wraps and to be very careful.

François was to be in waiting with the carriage at half-past ten—rather late for us, but the Coliseum could not be seen in its glory at an earlier hour. Many strangers, who had the opportunity, made the same expedition during their stay in Rome. Our hotel was too well situated to permit any disquietude, and the night attacks, which had sometimes taken place in the winter, were all on the dark staircases of private apartments.

Under these considerations, or rather instinctively acting

upon them, for no one thought of danger at all, we enjoyed our night drive until Alice complained of cold. The air proved more chilly than we expected, and after all some of the wraps prepared for her were left behind. A shawl of mine was transferred to her shoulders, and we arrived at our destination. There stood the noble wreck, the grandest and proudest that Rome has to show. What a light was streaming round, over, and about the broken shell cut so sharply against the clear grey sky! Prince Pietro was not there to receive us, detained probably by the friends who were to accompany him.

A little way from the entrance where we stopped, close under the wall, as if for concealment, was a small carriage without a driver. There was some peculiarity about its shape, which did not resemble that of a hack vehicle. What was it doing there, unless, like our own, it had brought some enterprising visitants to the scene?—with this exception, that whilst ours boldly dashed up to the principal point of ingress, that was drawn aside, a little in the shadow projected by a part of the wall. No one was visible as we entered the enclosure. As far as we could see, we had the vast area to ourselves. The only sound heard was the echo of our own footsteps. There was something so imposing about the cold grey walls, so solid yet so shattered, so quiet yet so eloquent, that none of us cared to break the solemn stillness. Even Madame Duval, habitually talkative, was silent at first in the presence of this "rugged desolation."

"The heart ran o'er with silent worship of the great of old."

Advancing slowly, in order to dwell the longer on the scene, we went up the centre, looking well from side to side until we reached the altar set up to consecrate the ruin—to disfigure it, would, in my opinion, be a more correct description of the effect produced. Here we waited for our escort, but no Prince Pietro came. Becoming impatient, Alice passed her arm through mine, and leaving the others in the

open space, urged me towards the arches under the seats, which were in deep shadow, thinking to pass through and take the view from the other side. We had taken a few steps under them, when Alice grasped my arm tightly, whispering—"Hark! Do you not hear something?"

We listened, but all was quiet; no sound but the rustling of my silk dress against one of the walls.

"Hark! I hear it again," said Alice.

This time I heard something also—a movement of some kind, and quite close. "Only a lizard, a mouse, or a bat," said I, endeavouring to give myself courage by fortifying hers.

Something like a suppressed sneeze was next heard, proceeding from an archway darker than the rest, into which as we gazed more intently, spell-bound by curiosity and alarm, the outline of a man appeared. "Come away! come away!" we mutually entreated below our breath, and tightly holding each other's hands, to prevent one outrunning the other, we turned and almost bounded into the centre.

Madame Duval and Mary Rivers were still standing where we left them, in wrapt contemplation of the beautiful moon, then casting its chastened radiance over the greater part of the arena. One small portion, that from which we had just fled with such precipitation, was in shadow, exhibiting, as our eyes turned towards it, when we found ourselves safe behind the others, a darker shade in one place than in the rest. This illusion, if such it were, lasted a minute, and then disappeared. How was it to be explained? for in our excited state we were disposed to give a signification to every trifling circumstance. The most obvious to my mind was that some one was concealed there, and had come forward to reconnoitre. Both Alice and I were afraid to make known our fears to our companions. Prince Pietro did not come. A little longer we waited, and then one of the party spoke. The voice sounded strange and unnaturally clear.

"Let us go home; Prince Pietro and his friends are not coming; there must be some mistake," said I aloud, and taking Alice by the arm, was about to retrace our steps towards our carriage.

"Oh, don't go yet!" entreated Mary Rivers. "As we are here, let us enjoy the scene. What a soft, lovely moonlight! Can anything be more beautiful! See these old grey stones, and consider the multitudes passed away since they were laid one upon another. Only to think of the terrible things that have taken place where we are even now standing!—the Christian blood here poured out!"

Mary was suddenly stopped in her enjoyment of the past. A stone fell at our feet, which by the sound we took to be a small pebble. The noise it made in falling was distinct, we all heard it; but whence did it come? Not from the roof, for the pure unclouded sky was the canopy over our heads; from the broken seats it could not reach us unless thrown designedly, for we were too far off. A suspicion flashed upon us all—becoming a certainty to Alice and myself—there was some one near and watching us! Previously alarmed, we two waited no longer, but losing all self-control, began to run, followed, I soon found, by the others, and never stopped till we reached the carriage. Here the uninterrupted moonlight streaming over the scene outside, made us half ashamed of our hasty flight. François and the coachman were chatting quietly together, and had seen no one about the Coliseum since we entered. Connecting our adventure in some way with the small carriage observed on our arrival, I looked round while my friends were taking their seats. It was still there, part of the horse's head was now in the light, and, to my hurried glance, it seemed that silver glittered upon the harness.

"The shawl!—your shawl, Mrs. Elmore! I must have dropped it in the Coliseum!"

Such was Alice's exclamation about five minutes after we had driven off. No one was disposed to return and seek it.

The loss was of no consequence to me, compared with the effort necessary for going back to the spot just quitted with such cowardly trepidation. We were, however, afraid for our invalid. Each one wished to contribute something—a handkerchief or a scarf, by way of additional clothing. Mary Rivers took off her own paletot, and would have put it over her cousin, but Alice refused. Except for certain secret reminiscences of my own, I should say it would be difficult to meet with a more headstrong temper, or one more incapable of realising consequences. Declaring herself quite warm and perfectly comfortable, she rejected all our offers and laughed at our anxiety. She was, I think, too excited for personal feeling until safe at home, when, as we walked up the staircase, I saw her shiver.

"Alice, you are cold, after all," said Mary Rivers, reproachfully.

"Not at all."

"I saw you shiver," I remarked.

"A habit I have," was the careless answer, as we separated with a general "good-night," she and her cousin retiring together.

For those who have not travelled, if such exist, I would describe our breakfast-room and its arrangements. Imagine a long, large hall, supported by pillars, which, if not of genuine marble, had all the appearance of it. Down the centre was a long table, laid out with various kinds of bread and small pots of honey or marmalade, and bordered on each side by a line of cups and saucers. Here the visitors seat themselves where they please, and are served according to order with tea, coffee, or anything they may require. Though all are independent, all are mixed, making it almost a certain thing to overhear the conversation of your neighbours.

The next morning Madame Duval and I were rather late, yet the room was tolerably full. Something interesting was under discussion; there was much talking, and several stood

about in knots of threes and fours. Chance, or a vacant space, brought us in the neighbourhood of three Italians, who were conversing eagerly. The word Coliseum soon caught my ear, and I listened attentively.

"Impossible; I saw him at the Opera last night with my own eyes," said one of the party, chipping an egg with an air of unconcern.

"And I tell you that his body was found in the Coliseum this morning stabbed in several places," returned the Italian.

The other desisted from his operations on the egg, and threw up his hands in dismay.

"What is the meaning of it? Who did it?" asked the third.

The one addressed raised his shoulders. "No clue whatever; the murderer has escaped. Probably a rendezvous was given and kept; they were alone, and the Duke, taken unawares, was easily killed."

"Was it an affair of love, politics, or vengeance?" asked one.

"Who knows?"

"Not politics, certainly, for Arenberg took little interest in them. He was no Roman," said the third.

At once the mysterious-looking carriage outside, and the figure hiding under the arch, came vividly before me, associating themselves with the crime. Doubtless the stone which fell among us had been purposely thrown in order to frighten us away before the time of assignation arrived, and, but for our timidity, we might have delayed, perhaps hindered, the meeting altogether, as in the company of Prince Pietro and his friends we should have lingered long, and possibly have thoroughly investigated the old stone arches. The culprit, not wishing to be recognised, might have gone away and left the deed undone, for it was more than probable that he might have been known to Prince Pietro, or one of his friends; it was so with the Duke d'Arenberg.

These reflections were scarcely made when they were succeeded by others more personal and painful, excited by the next remark overheard.

"A woman mixed up in it, as usual," said another, joining the speakers. "A lady's shawl has been found not far from the place where the body lay. It is now in the possession of the police."

The shock happily overpowered me. I was struck motionless, and made no cry. My heart almost ceased to beat, yet I had a full consciousness of the situation. I, who for every reason ought to seek retirement and obscurity, whether in accordance with my actual position or my husband's exaggerated sensitiveness, was now, in all probability, to be dragged forward in connection with a public scandal! My brain reeled under the thought, and a dread of the consequences it might entail. The ground seemed to rock under me. I could have wrung my hands in agony, foreseeing at once that the promise to restore Percy, so hardly obtained from Herbert, would now be withdrawn, and I judged unworthy, or at least too heedless and imprudent, to be trusted with my child.

Never before had I stood so seriously in need of a friend and counsellor. So perplexed and distressed was I that had Herbert been in Rome, I should have braved his displeasure and gone to him for advice. But here he could not be. Lionel had left more than a week, and had not seen Mr. Elmore for some days before his departure; it was too sure that he was far away. There was but one resource, and that was to apply to Colonel Palmer for advice how to act. True, I had no claim—he was a stranger, and could feel no interest in me; but his aunt, Mrs. Ewing, was my friend, and his niece Alice, in a measure, the cause of my embarrassment. In my dismay, I would have disowned the shawl had it rested with me; but Alice, Mary Rivers, Madame Duval, all knew that it was mine; was it likely that in a large hotel, where our

visit to the Coliseum the previous evening was sure to be known, some word, pointing to me as the owner, would not transpire? Visions of arraignment before some awful tribunal, and of questionings which would bring my name and history into notice, scared away the little judgment remaining, and almost shattered my sense of truth.

Breakfast for me was at an end, my only desire was to obtain an interview with Colonel Palmer.

On looking round, I saw him enter and seat himself at the other end of the table, where he was soon absorbed in a pamphlet, while waiting for his breakfast.

"Come with me," said I to Madame Duval, and steadying myself with her arm, I walked up to him and addressed him by name, not without some uneasiness as to how he might regard me now that I had come to him for advice.

"What is the matter?" he asked eagerly, rising and putting a chair forward. "You look as if some dreadful catastrophe had happened."

"It is so," I replied, sinking down into the chair, unable either to say more or to support myself.

"Is Alice——"

"No, no, nothing about Alice," I quickly rejoined; and then said abruptly, "I am in great trouble, will you help me?"

"You cannot doubt it. Only point out the way in which I can be of use," and laying down the pamphlet, he seemed prepared to give me his exclusive attention, but perceiving that I was agitated and fast losing all self-possession, he proposed leaving the public room for my private salon.

"No thank you; you can best serve me here. Have you heard that the Duke d'Arenberg was stabbed last night in the Coliseum?" asked I.

He had not heard, and listened attentively while Madame Duval detailed what had just come to our knowledge, in addition to the fright we had ourselves experienced.

"But, my dear Mrs. Elmore, they will not accuse you of being the murderer or even an accomplice," he said, with a half-amused smile, yet speaking in a tone which made me feel that, though he did not comprehend my anxiety, he did not mock it.

"A shawl was found," I hastened to explain; "that shawl was mine. I lent it to Alice, and in her haste she let it fall. The police have it now. Oh! shall I have to claim it? Anything happening to make me talked about will be dreadful."

The kind look was mingled with concern. Again he proposed taking me away, but I declined his assistance. Just then his breakfast was brought. Having made known my wishes, Madame Duval and I left the room. He was to ascertain, as far as might be, the truth of the story with all particulars.

It might have been an hour or nearly so ere I saw him again. During the interval, by dwelling almost entirely on the probable results to me of having to appear in any way mixed up with this affair, I worked myself into such a state of excitement, that as soon as he entered the room, I rushed forward, and clasping my hands together, asked in a tone of despair, "Must I—oh! must I own the shawl? Is there no help for it?" One idea alone occupied me.

The best and kindest of men often show their sense of superiority, when in the strength of their manhood they look down upon our ideas and expressions as impracticable and foolish. Perceiving at once that he did not sympathise in my distress about the shawl, nay, that he thought the occasion puerile, I said, in honest perplexity—

"What will my husband say if I have to come forward in such a case as this? He will never forget it. He will consider me too imprudent to be trusted with Percy, and will keep him away. Oh! my fate is very, very hard—I do not deserve it!" and, quite overcome, I drew back and burst into tears.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Elmore, your husband—I—I—don't understand—I thought—I imagined——"

Here he stopped and waited for an explanation, looking flushed and surprised. It could only come from me, Madame Duval being absent. Evident was it that he knew nothing of my history. To some men the voice of gossip is never addressed; he was one of them. More than a month we had passed in the same hotel; I had been in daily intimacy with his relations, and much in his society; yet he knew nothing more of me than that I was a Mrs. Elmore, travelling for my health with a friend. Further he had not cared to inquire. I could not leave him longer in his ignorance. Humiliating as was the confession I had to make, it must be done. Whilst hesitating how to begin, he unconsciously helped me by saying—

"I have laid my best and dearest in the grave, and thought that you had experienced a sorrow similar to my own."

I knew that he was a widower, and had buried his wife in India. Judging from my surroundings, he had supposed me to be in the same position. Obviously it was my duty to undeceive him. All bitter as explanation was, I must necessarily give it. I could not avail myself of his services in a false character.

"Your grief is not mine," said I, casting down my eyes in order not to meet the searching gaze fastened upon me; "I am no widow, but a forsaken wife. In an evil hour, under the influence of passionate jealousy, I left my husband's home. I have never been permitted to return—that is, not as before. I came back the next day to find the house empty, and my only child taken away—removed from my care entirely. I have sorely repented since, but too late! There is no effacing the past."

My voice first faltered, and then I broke down and sobbed aloud. My heart seemed as if it would burst with the force of the long pent-up feeling now overmastering me.

Colonel Palmer drew a chair near me, and on my sitting down took another for himself. "Where is Mr. Elmore?" he asked.

"I don't exactly know. He was here some time ago, for my friend, Lionel Osborne, saw him. He was then about leaving Rome for Greece; he must have left by this time."

I cannot recollect how it occurred, whether Colonel Palmer questioned or I voluntarily revealed;—the latter, most probably. My nerves were thoroughly shaken, and I was anxious to be open with my friend—if unduly desirous of standing well with him, I was not aware of it. However it might be, before the interview was over he was in possession of the principal facts of my life, including my last meeting with Herbert, which explained my uneasiness about the shawl.

"Be comforted on that point," said he, with a seriousness solemn enough to take away the comfort his words tried to offer; "I think there will be no difficulty in dealing with such a witness as that; don't make yourself unhappy about it. Will you come and see Alice?"

Diverted from myself, I was able to think of her, and to express a hope that she had not suffered from the night air. Colonel Palmer knew nothing about her, had not seen or heard of her, having been occupied with this tragedy at the Coliseum ever since I left him in the breakfast-room.

On entering Mrs. Leeson's apartment, we found Alice dressed, but wrapped up, complaining of the cold, and her large eyes glittered unnaturally.

"I am afraid my poor child has taken cold, and is going to be ill," said Mrs. Leeson.

"Nonsense, mamma, you are so fidgety. What if I have a little cold, it is nothing," replied Alice, impatiently putting away her mother's caressing hand.

At such moments as these, the beauty and tenderness of spirit inherent in Mary Rivers best showed itself. With a tact belonging only to unselfish characters, she always

sought some means of diverting her aunt's attention from these painful wounds inflicted upon her affection, though as is often the fate of a poor relation, she met with scanty thanks for her exertions. Mrs. Leeson being too much absorbed in her daughter to estimate Mary's kindnesses at their proper value, received them habitually as a matter of course.

A diversion was soon made by the entrance of Prince Pietro, who was immediately called upon by the imperious Alice to account for his broken engagement. For once he was able to satisfy her. They were a few minutes later than the time fixed, and must have arrived soon after we left the Coliseum. After waiting awhile, finding we did not come, they drove to our hotel, and hearing of our safe return, went quietly back to their respective homes. Alice's bickerings with her lover and mother were silenced that day, every personal feeling being merged into the one topic of interest —the crime perpetrated the previous night, and our own unpleasant adventure.

"This will be thoroughly investigated, and the murderer will, I hope, be discovered," said Prince Pietro. "We have had too much of this sort of thing. If the assassin is not found and punished, something will come of it. The people are already dissatisfied enough. They are tired of their weak rulers. There are three objects of identification, all now in the hands of the authorities—a shawl, a letter, and a watch."

I did not notice the third, or wait to give any explanation of the first, but with a hasty ejaculation, rushed towards the door.

"What is it?" asked Colonel Palmer, who having risen almost simultaneously with myself, first had possession of the handle.

"The letter!—the letter perhaps it is mine!" and darting past him I ran to my own apartment. A letter from my sister, fully addressed, had been given me at the dinner-

table, which, after glancing over, I had put into my pocket. Could it, could it be that, pursued by some dread fatality, I had let it fall when in the ruins the previous evening?

"Where is Watson?—where is my dress? Watson! Watson!" I frantically called, bursting into the salon where Madame Duval was engaged writing; and, rushing into the adjoining room, I commenced a nervous opening of drawers and closets. A loud exclamation from Madame Duval brought me back. She was in earnest conversation with Colonel Palmer. "Hush! hush!" I heard him say, "do not frighten her."

I went straight up to him. "I am the most unlucky woman in the world. I feel convinced that the letter is mine. Last evening I received one from my sister, and put it in my pocket. Why! oh why is it that I am so unfortunate? A spell is on me. With all my anxiety to prevent it, I must ever be doing something to make myself talked about; and Herbert so particular. Oh! he will never forgive me!"

I sank down helpless into the nearest chair and covered my face, feeling so sure that he would make this accident the excuse for not letting me have Percy. "Any other man might be made to understand, but Herbert is so foolishly sensitive." I murmured this, thinking I was alone, for I had seen Colonel Palmer walk towards the door, and had heard some one leave the room.

"Madame Duval is gone for your maid," said a voice I recognised. Colonel Palmer was standing near, and regarding me with pitying eyes. I felt sorry for my indiscretion, but thought it better to let it pass.

Watson soon appeared, and received orders to search for the letter, though assuring me that it was useless. Having emptied my pocket when the dress was taken off, she could be certain that no letter was there. She was right. No trace of the letter was anywhere to be found. The fact was too obvious: I must have dropped it, and now remembered

having my handkerchief in my hand when near the altar. Madame Duval loudly vented her regret and her sympathy, breaking off after every sentence into some characteristic expletive.

"We had better consult Prince Pietro," observed Colonel Palmer—a kindness I appreciated, for a great coldness existed between them. "Come, Mrs. Elmore," he said cheerfully, "do not suffer a small *contre-temps* to depress you. If you have to claim the letter, my niece's name shall come forward also as the loser of the shawl."

On returning to Mrs. Leeson's apartment, we found that something else was added to the events of the previous evening, which complicated the history yet more. Two of Prince Pietro's friends had dropped in. One of them, Signor Laurenti, was relating the part in which he had been concerned, and which really seemed of a nature to throw some light upon the mystery. Whilst Prince Pietro and one of his friends waited outside the Coliseum, thinking that perhaps after all we should come, Signor Laurenti strolled through it, and when passing under one of the arches, struck against some one apparently entering. With a courteous "scusatemi," he walked on. After enjoying the moonlight for a few minutes, he suddenly missed his watch. Suspecting it to have been taken in that moment's contact, he quickly turned back, thinking there might be a chance of catching the thief, if he had not already made his escape. A figure was distinctly visible in long, dark garments, but whether those of priest or layman, frock or cloak, he could not tell. With a rapid spring he seized the lurker and taxed him with the theft. A watch and chain were instantly put into his hands, and the culprit slipped away, Signor Laurenti caring more to recover his lost property than to secure the offender. "Judge of my surprise," said Signor Laurenti, completing his narrative, "when, on reaching my own room, I took a handsome gold repeater from my pocket, and saw my own watch on the dressing-table! I had accidentally left it behind. The watch

has been since deposited in the hands of justice, and will, it is supposed, be the means of bringing the crime home to the perpetrator."

The whole day was one of commotion. The letter, the shawl, and the story of the watch were in everybody's mouth, discussed, and commented upon. Prince Pietro and Colonel Palmer made several attempts to obtain the restoration of the letter, but without success. Their account of the manner in which it was lost was not doubted, but the letter might yet be useful and could not be given up.

Rome was in a fever of indignation, and determined to discover the culprit and have justice upon the assassin. Poor Alice was little thought of by any of us, except her mother, to whom she would not listen, but insisted on sitting up, though really weak and suffering, no inconsiderable excitement being maintained by persons continually coming with fresh bits of news or unveracious *on dits*.

Just before dinner Colonel Palmer paid me a visit. By the gravity of his countenance I saw that he was the bearer of no good news, and said so.

"Most circumstances are mixed in this life," he said, with a smile meant to be encouraging, and then proceeded to inform me that the watch having rendered all other testimony superfluous, Prince Pietro's explanation had been favourably received, and that the letter would be restored the following morning on my personal application.

"And where am I to go?—what am I to do?" asked I in a tone of dismay, for the fear of publicity haunted me.

"It will be no formidable affair," said the Colonel, kindly "Prince Pietro and I will accompany you to the hall of the police, in the characters of interpreter and friend. You will be asked if the letter and shawl are yours. The statement made by us respecting the time and place of their loss will be read over, and you will be requested to put your seal to its truthfulness by signing your name—that is all."

"That is all!" I repeated, dolefully. Probably the un-

easiness I felt was depicted on my countenance, for Colonel Palmer's usual kindness of manner deepened into almost brotherly tenderness as he endeavoured to argue away my fears and too evident distress.

I never could understand Alice's depreciation of her uncle. Though serious rather than gay, he was affectionate in the family circle—reserved at times to strangers, but when disposed to unbend or admit any one into intimacy, he was most winning and agreeable. I was not long in discovering that the friendship of such a man raised and honoured those who were permitted to enjoy it.

Before dinner was over the topic of the day underwent another change, at least the interest attached to it. It had been said that the body of the murdered duke was to lie in state the following morning, to be visited by his friends and the public. A report came that this was not to be, but that the remains were already prepared for transport to his native land; the victim, though living at Rome, being of the Belgian branch of the house of Arenberg. After that first day no stir was made. The arm of justice was suddenly paralysed, and no satisfactory explanation given. That deed, like many others, was not brought home to the perpetrator.

Ecclesiastical rule appears to be characterised by extremes; it either strikes with vindictive vengeance, or holds the scales of justice with a feeble hand. In the heart-rending annals of the Inquisition and other persecutions, history bears witness to the one; and the pages of the daily journals, where crime is so often seen to escape its merited punishment, sufficiently attest the other.

My part in the melancholy incident was duly executed the following morning. I remember ascending a broad, black marble staircase, which had no association with cleanliness, and, attended by my two friends, was ushered into a large dingy room, where a middle-aged man, with a considerable amount of gold chain, was sitting before a table,

while another rather younger stood near, as if waiting for orders. My letter and the shawl were produced, and, through the interposition of Prince Pietro, recognised and claimed. A paper was read over, translated sentence by sentence by Prince Pietro in order to make sure of my comprehending it, and a pen was handed to me. I hesitated. "Courage, it is only a formality," whispered Colonel Palmer. I wrote my name and address as directed, and returned home with the miserable conviction that in those few words I had signed away my last hope of happiness, feeling sure that if the circumstance came to my husband's knowledge, he would rescind his promise respecting Percy, considering me unfit to have the charge of him—a decision which I well knew would be confirmed by Lady Elmore.

Ours was the last evening visit paid to the Coliseum for that season. After the assassination of the duke, no one was allowed to go inside the ruin after sunset, the order to that effect being maintained by French soldiers placed there as sentries.

One good thing came out of the affair, so I thought it then. My history was no longer a secret, and the kindness of my new friends remained undiminished; nay, on the part of Mrs. Ewing and Colonel Palmer, it seemed to increase, the tender-heartedness of the one and the chivalrous respect of the other being more apparent than before.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE SHADOW.

THE tragedy of the Coliseum soon gave place to one of a domestic nature. After battling against a severe cold for some days, Alice's strength gave way, and she was obliged to take to her bed. Patiently and unweariedly the anxious parent watched her sick child night and day and day and night, comforted by no sign of improvement. With a caprice for which I could not account, the wayward girl clung to me more than to mother, uncle, or cousin. "Stay with me," was her repeated request whenever she saw me. Though I could do little more than hold her feverish hand in mine, she would not willingly let me leave her. "Don't let Uncle Earnest or Aunt Ewing talk to me; they speak about religion, and I can't bear it, it makes me dull; tell me of something pleasant, Mrs. Elmore." Such was her appeal to me, almost in a tone of gentle entreaty, while petulant murmurs of fatigue and weariness were addressed to her aunt and uncle, even when in the tenderest tones they endeavoured to awaken her careless mind to the momentous importance of the present. It was a painful time to us all, sadly solemn to all eyes but her own. Alice was passing away; the young life was slowly ebbing. Wealth and skill did their utmost, but the cords that held her here were loosening gradually one by one.

The poor mother, heart-stricken with grief, was often obliged to leave her child's pillow in order to conceal her uncontrollable feelings. With the weakness which had ever characterised her dealings with Alice, Mrs. Leeson to

the last was desirous to spare her the distress which the knowledge of her danger might occasion, and entreated us to banish solemn looks and anxious words when about the invalid.

"Do not talk to Alice about religion at present," she said beseechingly to Colonel Palmer one morning as he was about to visit his niece. "She will think she is going to die, and the very idea will hasten her end."

Colonel Palmer looked at her with surprise, saying, "Are we not told that there is no hope?"

"Yes, but—but—is it necessary? She is not a bad child, only self-willed, and she never did anything absolutely wrong," faltered the poor mother, conscious perhaps that she was pleading a weak cause. "God is so merciful; He will not be severe upon the negligencies of youth."

"My dear sister," began Colonel Palmer—clasping her hand kindly between his own, and regarding her with mournful tenderness, as a pitying angel might have done when brought in contact with the sorrows of humanity—"do not be satisfied to let a beloved child depart under such a delusion. Give her something truer and better to take with her as she goes from death to judgment."

"Pray do not frighten her by letting her see that you think her in danger," urged Mrs. Leeson, and this time with tears.

"If the house were on fire, would you leave your idolised child to perish in the flames, or would you make an effort to save her? Would you be afraid to wake her—even roughly if unavoidable, or would you wait till it was too late to attempt her rescue?"

Leaving the brother and sister together, I joined Mary Rivers, who was stationed at the sick-bed. At my approach Alice turned her face towards me, and never shall I forget its expression. Often after tossing about her pillow she would maintain a long silence, only occasionally opening her lips to utter some feeble wail of peevishness or pain, but

now she was eager to speak. Another sign, and that more distressing than any I had before witnessed, was on her brow. Terror was writing its too visible mark in the cold dews that bathed it. With a nervous clutch she grasped my hand, and whispered in a hollow tone, "I am not going to die!" regarding me at the same time with a searching eagerness that sought to penetrate my thoughts. With the acuteness of hearing often acquired in illness, she must have overheard a portion of the conversation passing in the next room, yet the door was nearly closed and the speakers were far off.

"I cannot! I cannot die!—I am so young! Oh! I wish so much to live! I will live!" said Alice, vehemently. "I must live! Will no one save me? Oh! mother, mother, I have been unkind and self-willed. I will not be so again. I am not fit to die! Oh! mother, dear mother, save me! save me!"

Mrs. Leeson heard the agonised call, and was instantly at her side. "My dear love!" was all she could utter, as bending over her darling, she clasped her with sobs to her bosom.

"Oh! mother, save me, I cannot die!" and with cries painful to hear, the poor girl clung to her mother's neck till, the paroxysm over, faint and exhausted, she sank back upon her pillow and closed her eyes. Mrs. Leeson had nothing to give in answer but tears. She had trained this beautiful girl for the world, and till now had thought her system good and successful.

Alice's young life, happy while it lasted, was really drawing to a close. Even now the waters which were to bear her to an unknown land touched her feet, and neither rudder nor compass had been provided to guide her. The world she thought her so fitted to adorn as well as to enjoy was receding—its glitter was fading, its interests were departing, and she had nothing substantial to offer her loved one in their stead. The education she had given her

was hollow and baseless, it had no foundation upon which a sure hope could be firmly anchored. Poor mother! her very love had been faulty and unkind, strengthening by indulgence the evil she ought to have eradicated. Nor was this all; Mrs. Leeson was powerless to minister to her daughter's comfort, or speak a word in season to the terrified spirit. She could furnish no guide for the feet now "stumbling on the dark mountains," nor point to the lamp which could dispel the gloom gathering round the tottering footsteps as they entered the dreaded valley. The faith which extracts the sting from death, and grasps "the rod and the staff" offered by a gracious Saviour to steady the heart and eye in that momentous passage, was not hers—how then could she press its consolations on her child? That labour of love she was obliged to leave to others. Eternity had hitherto been to her a dim vision of something yet a long way off; now that it was near—about to be entered by one dearer than herself—it was a tremendous reality she knew not how to face.

Each passing day diminished the strength of the sufferer, who continually used the little she possessed in making earnest entreaties that more physicians might be sent for, repeating sometimes wildly, sometimes mournfully, "I cannot!—I cannot die!"

In the stillness that succeeded some of these outbursts of fear and grief, Colonel Palmer's voice fell solemnly and persuasively on our ears, as, with frequent pauses, he slowly repeated, "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God;" "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners;" "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest;" "Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out." Wise and kind, he endeavoured by gentle and loving words, spoken now and then, to engage her mind, and from time to time expressed the spirit of these verses in short prayers. Poor Alice gave

no sign of understanding or feeling. She grew weaker and weaker. On and ever on—nearer and nearer came the relentless foe, eager to shroud our pretty Alice, with all her hopes, fancies, talents, and expectations, in the tomb. Contrary to expectation she lingered from day to day; days of anguish they were to us—of agony to the poor mother.

Nothing more could be done for the sufferer. She still kept me near her; perhaps in my careless character she found something soothing and more analogous to her own. One evening, worn with grief and exhausted by the feelings the sick chamber obliged me to repress, I answered Alice's pathetic request to hold her fast, by a burst of tears, and by the doctor's orders was taken out of the room. Sweet Mary Rivers was soon by my side, saying, "Uncle has sent me to take care of you. He says you must not return to-night—that you are worn out."

This fragile girl, almost a child, sustained by some inward force I did not possess, bore up bravely. She was ever at hand to soothe her aunt, to wait on those who attended Alice, and always on the watch to help, while I was crushed and useless. The mother's despair, Alice's heart-rending lamentations whenever she did speak, and the unwearied appeals to Divine Love for mercy and compassion which continually rose around that dying bed either from Colonel Palmer or Mrs. Ewing, overtaxed my powers of self-control. Even Prince Pietro was touched. For a while he stood aloof with his arms folded, looking from time to time at his betrothed, sustaining himself with the cold philosophy of a fatalist; but I heard that at the last he too, subdued by the earnestness of the watchers or excited by example, knelt down with the others. In this supreme hour of trial, when brought face to face with the great reality of Time, I had no more substantial support than he had. I made more professions, but like leaves nipped by the frost, they fell away at the breath of the first wintry

blast. In the heyday of youth I was not accustomed to give my mind to serious thoughts—in my hour of retribution, I had only embittered sorrow by rebellion against it. The question came, and would be answered—"Were your positions reversed, what have you more than Alice?" Those who have seen a life closing, dark and clouded as hers, may understand the dread anguish with which my inner self felt compelled to reply—"Nothing." I will spare the reader the tears I shed, the resolutions I made. The fact that I yet lived, thought, and prayed, after so many years of ignorance and negligence, disposed me to thankfulness, and led me to hope that I should turn my future life to better account.

That night, painful as it was, marked a new era in my existence. Neither Mary nor I could make up our minds to go to bed. Wearily and sadly passed the hours away; we could not sleep, for we knew that in the next room the young spirit battled for its earthly life, and tender kindred wrestled for a human soul. Just before dawn, suddenly startled by a sound between a scream and a groan, we both hurried into the sick chamber. Alice still lived, but the labouring breath came feebler and feebler. Her eyes, now still and glazed, were fastened on Colonel Palmer, who knelt close to her, and her attenuated hands were clasped together. I thought her lips moved. A pained, anxious eager expression lingered on her face; she neither stirred nor removed her eyes from her uncle, but gradually the countenance relaxed, the features stiffened. All the rest was told in the sobs that echoed round her.

"My darling!—my Alice!—my beautiful one! Why could I not die for you!" ejaculated the heart-broken mother. "I never thought it would come to this, my best and dearest!"—and she rocked herself to and fro in her misery, resisting Mrs. Ewing's attempt to lead her from the room.

Next to Mrs. Leeson I had the least self-control. My

hysterical sobbing was arrested by Colonel Palmer taking me and Mary Rivers by the hand and leading us away.

"It is hard upon you, Mrs. Elmore, to be brought into the midst of our family sorrow," he said kindly.

"It is so sad, so dreadful, I never realised death before," replied I, with a fresh burst of tears.

"Sooner or later we must all pass through the gate of death," said Colonel Palmer; "but it need not be a saddening thought. 'The righteous hath hope in his death.'"

"But Alice, poor Alice!" we both sobbed out.

"We cannot follow her, nor may we limit the mercy and power of God," he added, after a moment's pause. "Let us try and live for Him who, if He pleases, can turn the shadow of death into morning—a bright and glorious morning, without a cloud to darken it." He looked upwards, as if some such remembrance was stored there for him. Was his earthly treasure in that happy land?

No thirsty flower ever drank in the dew more eagerly than I listened to him as he kindly and tenderly admonished us both to lay to heart the solemn scene we had lately witnessed. What might once have appeared to me a wearisome lecture, was now precious as food, light, and life. In my then distressed state of mind, his words were as healing balm. I listened with a hungry craving for nourishment, whilst he proved to me, by God's own word, that no aching heart need ever bear its burden alone, that no sin-stricken conscience need despair. It had only to turn to Him who declared Himself "mighty to save," and would "save to the uttermost all that come unto God by him."

Alice sleeps in the little cemetery outside the walls, where those of our faith are permitted to lay their beloved ones. Dearer in death than in life, her memory is cherished by me, for I owe it much.

CHAPTER XXIX.

GLIMPSES OF LIGHT.

WILL you give up your niece to me? I should feel very grateful. Her companionship would do me good as well as give me pleasure."

These words were addressed by me to Colonel Palmer about ten days after Alice had been conveyed to her last resting-place on earth, and referred to Mary Rivers. Mrs. Leeson, since the loss of her daughter, had shrunk from Mary's presence. Her sweet voice and winning ways were evidently painful to her aunt, who showed almost a dislike to her society. Our party was breaking up. Prince Pietro had left Rome; his connection with the family, never desired by the senior members, had come to a natural termination. Colonel Palmer was about to conduct his sister to England, yet undetermined whether to leave Mary Rivers with Mrs. Ewiug and me, or to take her with him.

"You are very kind, Mrs. Elmore," was his reply to the request I had made.

"Pray do not answer so formally," I said quickly, a little hurt at the ceremonious tone adopted. We had lately been on such good terms; I had derived strength from his counsels, and had even indulged the hope of having gained in him a real and serviceable friend. "I love your niece, she has captivated my heart." Then I added, more seriously, "If I do not rob you, throw a little interest into a lot that is very dreary."

"With all my heart, if it be in my power. Poor Mary is delicate. This painful season has tried her. Only this

morning the doctor told me not to expose her to an English winter until she became stronger."

"I will take her anywhere you please," I began, with my accustomed eagerness; then suddenly remembering that though lonely I was not free, that if Percy were restored to me I might be restricted in the choice of a residence, I stopped abruptly, coloured, and added, almost under my breath—"if I may." I clung much to the hope of having Mary Rivers with me, but saw the difficulties in the way. She then entered the room, and, at her uncle's call, came towards us. She was soon within the shelter of his arm, looking at him with her shy, soft eyes, so tender and expressive, while he stated the request I had just made, ending with the question, "Would you like to pass the summer with Mrs. Elmore?"

"Very much," was the quick response, and the gentle, loving girl wound her disengaged arm round me and drew me nearer, almost close to her uncle.

"Then be it so," he said, with a kind smile intended for us both; "but where is the summer to be spent? Being Mary's natural guardian, I must have a voice in the arrangements which concern her."

I was only too happy to be advised, too glad to be linked by any bond to such estimable members of the family as Mrs. Ewing and Colonel Palmer. The former was bright, quick, and intelligent, taking fresh and novel views in general, a cheerful, interesting companion; and in the noble manhood of the other was decision and strength. I could have envied the weak one permitted to lean upon him.

The day for Mrs. Leeson's departure drew nigh. Just before she left, Madame Duval, summoned home to attend her mother, was obliged to leave me sooner than I expected. Mary Rivers being my prospective companion, it came suddenly to pass that my affairs and plans became a topic for family discussion. What a relief it was to find

that some one cared for me; that in that distant land I had not to sit apart and take counsel with myself alone, but that wisdom and tender solicitude weighed every plan and proposition before any step was taken. Ultimately it was settled that Mrs. Ewing should remain with Mary and me as long as we lingered in Rome, and afterwards would accompany us to some of those wild nooks in Switzerland, with which long habits of travelling had made her acquainted, and where her frequent visits had procured her many friends.

"A thousand pardons, Mrs. Elmore; I trust I shall be forgiven. This letter I found at the porter's lodge late last evening; you had retired, and I was unwilling to have you disturbed by such a messenger," said Colonel Palmer, handing me a letter with a deep black border, as soon as he saw me the morning that he and Mrs. Leeson were going away. His eyes were fixed on me anxiously and kindly. Whatever the news, and my heart beat quickly at the first glance at that broad dark rim, I knew that help and sympathy were at hand.

"From Lionel Osborne," I said aloud, a little reassured by the recognition of his writing.

Lady Mayfort was no more. He had been with her to the last, and kindly wrote me the particulars of an event in which he knew I should be interested. One clause in the letter mingled a smile with my tears. "She has forgiven me; she sent her love to me before she died," I said, in reply to Colonel Palmer's expressed hope that my news was not very distressing.

"Who has forgiven you?"

"Lady Mayfort, my old, my dear friend; I am so happy!"

These last were singular words to follow the announcement of her removal, but that estrangement had ever made my heart heavy when I thought of it. Her sending her love so lightened it that I could not help expressing

aloud a superstitious hope that this was an omen of brighter days in the future.

"For what has she forgiven you?" asked Colonel Palmer, to whom my expressions and manner appeared a curious riddle.

This question revealing the incongruity between my language and my tears, brought me back to my position. Feeling obliged to answer, I said simply, "For not marrying her nephew."

"Dear Mrs. Elmore, permit me to urge one thing upon you before we part." He had taken my hand to say "good-bye," and it rested willingly in his firm clasp, while I waited to hear what he wished to say. "Don't think so much whether you are to be happy or unhappy in the future, but try to enjoy the every-day blessings you possess. Think, rather, how you may best testify thankfulness to the Giver."

Apparently there was not much in these parting words, yet, when endeavouring to put them in practice, I found them charged with wisdom and kindness. They often checked anxious anticipations, turned fretful repinings into patient endurance, and made me seek causes for more contentment with the present.

The summer days went pleasantly by. In the company of Mrs. Ewing and Mary Rivers, I visited many interesting places in Switzerland, passing the time chiefly in mountain spots, where pure air and fine scenery tended to promote both health and enjoyment.

The human heart, notwithstanding all that has been written about it, will always remain a puzzle—a *terra incognita* even to ourselves. Who will pretend to fathom it? Who can even guess the possibilities within the compass of the flesh and blood constituting our separate identities? The lot I once thought unendurable, I was now bearing with something more than equanimity. Separation from Herbert, which once represented all of

sorrow or misery I could even conceive, now, under these Alpine skies, ceased to weigh upon me. I looked into my heart for my late despair, and found a pleasurable excitement in its stead. A great change had come over me. I was in a new world. The natural beauties around awakened me to impressions unfelt before. The rocks and the hills, the stars and the flowers—the one by day, the other by night—taught each a lesson I was willing to learn. Their loveliness and sublimity found responses within. With my present companions these traces of the glory of Omnipotence, though "dimly seen," had a deepening reality, declaring, in language to which my whole soul subscribed, that let philosophers say what they would, there is a present reward in simple faith which all their wisdom is powerless to gainsay.

I dare not affirm that the improvement in my views and character was great, but it was real as far as it went. A truth was coming to me—a truth one is slow to learn, but which once learnt lifts us into a purer atmosphere. I felt how every thought and care in my past life had been for self. The very love on which I had prided myself was selfish from first to last. What was Herbert the better for all the affection I had professed and cherished for him? It had only annoyed and thwarted him. I could remember no one act in my married life where I had shown a wish to conciliate him, or to promote his pleasure by any self-denial. The humiliation thus commenced was destined to be deepened yet more.

At the end of August, Colonel Palmer joined us in one of those beautiful resorts where travellers, glad to exchange the closeness of city or plain for mountain air, flock in sultry weather. Well I remember one evening, when, after admiring the rugged crags, usually so stern and gloomy, now purpled into glory by the setting sun, we sat down on a fallen tree to watch the lingering, rosy rays sparkle on the distant snow. The lovely lake of the Four Cantons lay at our feet, smooth and clear, until the cold shadows stole

over its surface, and darkness shrouded the still waters below. We talked—oh! those evening talks when nature is hushed to repose and "all the air a solemn stillness holds." How naturally we drop the cloak of reserve gathered round us in the daily intercourse, and how involuntarily sometimes heart reveals itself to heart! Alice was the first link. Her short life, her almost sudden death, often formed a topic of conversation. Although Colonel Palmer would not allow us to push our speculations beyond the grave, he encouraged the serious turn our reflections had taken, and, for the first time in my hearing, alluded to the death of his wife, whose sun had set amid the glorious hopes of a triumphant Christian. Mrs. Ewing had known her—Mary Rivers had not, and took advantage of the opportunity to inquire whom of all their acquaintance she most resembled.

"In person and in natural vivacity, Mrs. Elmore reminds me of her," answered Colonel Palmer, in a tone of voice in which my sensitive ear caught a reservation not flattering to myself, and I hastily remarked, I fear in an accent of pique, "But very superior."

Without noticing my observation he added, "She was a lovely Christian—gentle, firm, and consistent, and was both a help and a blessing to me."

My little resentment was silenced. Very, very different would be the testimony that Herbert must bear of me. Mrs. Palmer had an imperishable honour, while I could only bend my head in shame and contrition.

The falling dew warned us to quit our seat overlooking the lake, but the sweet air made us linger out of doors. Strolling up and down on the uneven turf, among the few châlets scattered about, and listening to the evening chant with which many of these simple mountain peasants close the toil of the day, I stumbled over the rough stones projecting here and there in the path. "Take my arm," said Colonel Palmer; "you can then walk more fearlessly." I did so, and, by this ordinary circumstance, we fell a little apart from

the others. The desultory talk went on, becoming by degrees more confidential. Without a thought of danger either to myself or him, much of my character and its influence over my married life was revealed—my faults and my sorrows, my follies and their punishment. He sympathised and counselled—I listened and drank in the sweet intoxication of having my mistakes and delinquencies tenderly dealt with; condemned indeed, but the remedy kindly pointed out. Persuasively he urged on me the endeavour to begin life anew by placing before myself a higher and better aim than mere earthly happiness. Domestic confidences are unsafe. I knew it theoretically, but the spell of "the witching hour of eve" was upon me, stronger than my judgment, until I became conscious of the wish that it had been my good fortune to find in the companion of my life a mind high and noble as Colonel Palmer's. The halo which my youthful fancy drew around my husband's head vanished into air. I saw him now with different eyes, and wondered at my former infatuation.

In a few days our happy little party was disturbed, and obliged to take the future into consideration. The post brought me two letters from England. One from my sister, who, having heard that Madame Duval had been summoned home, expressed some anxiety about my remaining longer abroad. Julie, she added, had been ill, and would gladly join me if I objected to return. Although she described her as somewhat softened by illness, the proposition, evidently desired by them both, was distasteful. At all times unsympathetic, Julie's society, after that of my present companions, would be more than usually unwelcome. Yet some decision must be made. Mrs. Ewing had her own pursuits and sphere of action, and could not remain with me long. Mary Rivers was an orphan, dependent on her uncle, who professed some interest in my concerns. Could I secure Mary's companionship and have my little Percy with me, the vista of life for a few years to come did not appear very

gloomy. Colonel Palmer had agreed to her spending the summer and autumn with me, but the winter was conditional. The physician having recommended a warm climate, her living with me depended upon my being at liberty to choose my own residence, a point on which I was very doubtful. The slight reference made to that subject by Herbert in our last interview, indicated the expectation of my remaining in England. One thing alone was certain, I would not have Julie for my household companion. Having speedily arrived at this determination, I opened the second letter. It was from Mr. Slater, dated from the Beeches, and ran thus :—

"DEAR MRS. ELMORE,

"Mr. Elmore commissions me to inform you that he is willing to fulfil his promise to place your little boy under your care whenever you are ready to receive him. Having been staying here a few days, I can satisfactorily inform you that the little fellow is well and much grown. On the receipt of this you will probably leave Switzerland. Be so good as to keep me acquainted with your movements, as it will devolve upon me to make arrangements for carrying out your wishes. I hope you will return to England in better health than when you left it. Miss Kenyon has been seriously ill, but is now better. Waiting your reply,

"I remain, yours faithfully,

"E. SLATER."

Herbert had not been unmindful of his promise. As yet, the incidents which had occurred in Rome, and which I always feared would be converted into an excuse for not keeping it, had not reached him. I was to be trusted with Percy, and now came the important question—Should I be permitted to take him where I pleased? Upon that depended a companionship of so much value to me. My husband kept aloof. By deputing Mr. Slater to communicate with me, it was evident that he had no intention to open a correspondence. Perhaps he was afraid of some attack upon the freedom he found so pleasant. From me he really had nothing to fear. I had ceased to look upon a reconciliation as probable. Whether my life were long or short, I had now a conviction that some duty must be woven into its pattern—that I had something to do for my child, for myself, or for

my neighbour. A little uneasiness of mind I felt at shrinking so much from Julie, but with a half-heartedness not uncommon, I resolved to atone for shortcoming on one side by diligence on another.

Nothing had been said positively about the home I was to make. Mr. Slater had only mentioned my return to England casually, as a matter of course. Was it to be inferred that I had no choice on the subject? In discussing the point with my friends, Mrs. Ewing advised me to express my wishes to Mr. Slater, and leave the matter in his hands. Colonel Palmer recommended a direct appeal to my husband. He was more than surprised at the answer—"I will never put pen to paper to address him again until he first writes to me," said I, with a flash of the old fire. "He is dead to me; he has no feeling for anybody but himself and those that contribute to his amusement." Alas! was I not passionately repeating the opinion Mr. Norris once gave of his father, whom I then blindly wished him to resemble as the more estimable of the two parents? No one answered me until I had recovered myself, and the return of my better spirit was evidenced by a few repentant tears.

Colonel Palmer was the first to speak, and very softly, almost timidly, he said, "You can do what many a godly woman has done for a graceless husband—what my sainted wife did for me—pray for him."

"For you?" I interrupted, in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, for me, in those careless days when I thought I should have loved her better had she been less pious, not perceiving that the graces and excellencies which so strongly riveted my affection were not, and could not be, earth-born. I thank God that her prayers for me to be brought to a better mind were answered, and that she was permitted to know it. No hour of her life brought her so much happiness, I verily believe, as the one that convinced her of our faith and hopes being the same."

It was seldom that Colonel Palmer spoke of himself, for

he was naturally reserved. Only now and then with a motive, on such occasions as the present, he permitted a ray from the past to steal into the present. Returning quickly to the discussion of my affairs, he now seconded Mrs. Ewing's advice, and upon that I acted.

Mr. Slater being fully made acquainted with my wishes, and charged to act for me, was to send his next letter to Paris, whither Mrs. Ewing and Mary Rivers were to accompany me. If the reply were favourable, Mary and I were, in due time, to go to the south; if otherwise, Mrs. Ewing remained with her until Colonel Palmer could take her under his own charge.

Some days elapsed before the arrival of the anxiously-expected letter. As I feared, there had been difficulties. Lady Elmore had violently opposed Percy's removal from England, predicting injury to his health; but my husband, influenced probably by Mr. Slater, saw no objection. After some hesitation, with his usual love of ease when his own wishes were untouched, Herbert was about to adopt his mother's opinion, when Mr. Slater happily proposed taking medical advice. Percy being very delicate, the physician consulted decided in favour of a warm climate. Mr. Slater wrote word that instead of my going to England, as I had proposed to fetch Percy, he would bring him to me, and had arranged with Mr. Elmore to escort both nurse and child to Paris, and see them safely placed under my responsibility, I being required at the commencement of each month to send an account of Percy's health to Lady Elmore.

CHAPTER XXX.

MOTHER AND CHILD.

SOME uneasiness was in my mind as the time for Percy's arrival approached. We had been separated a year and a half—a long period in his short life. I could not tell how far his affections were estranged. My heart felt heavy; I knew it would ache sorely if made to feel the indifference of my child. Yet this was more than probable. Besides the natural effect of absence upon one so young, Lady Elmore's influence would be against me. Added to a deep love for her grandchild—the strongest attachment of which her impassive nature had shown itself capable—was a decided dislike to me. It was not reasonable to expect her to cherish my place in his infantine memory. Desirous of having the first meeting in private, that there might be no witnesses of my mortification if the child turned away, I requested Mary Rivers to bring him herself into my room, where I retired as soon as a bustle in the corridor announced an arrival. A moving of chairs on the polished floor, the pattering of little feet, and next the treble voice of Percy, soon told who were the visitors.

I may be laughed at, yet it is true I had made my toilet that morning with as much care as a belle might do for a ball. Children are often influenced by appearance—my yearning heart sought to strengthen its claim by attention to them. "Come to mamma," I heard Mary Rivers say, and the two, hand-in-hand, beautiful after the same delicate type, appeared in the doorway. Percy's bright eye and transparent complexion absolutely startled me. The unex-

pected fragility of my treasure thrilled me with alarm. Unmindful of the impression produced, I flung my arms round him and strained him wildly to my bosom, to his evident surprise. Accustomed to the controlled fondness of his grandmother, the demonstrative character of mine frightened him. He struggled to be free, and had no sooner extricated himself from my arms, than, most likely fearing a repetition of the rough embrace, he stood a few paces off surveying me with wonder and distrust.

My past folly and its bitter fruit never before impressed me so forcibly. The little darling was Heaven's own gift—a treasure committed to my love—that sweet mysterious principle derived from Deity itself, and if, in the fierce tumult of an unsanctified heart, I had not altogether despised the possession, I had certainly undervalued it. Oh! unutterable shame, in a moment of reckless anger, I had abandoned it! I threw up my hands and wrung them, then clasped them over my face, feeling that to recover it, even amid the anguish of the child's indifference, was more than I deserved.

Percy, astonished at an exhibition of feeling never witnessed in the calm atmosphere of the Beeches, and wishing perhaps to change the scene into something more intelligible to him, came nearer, and, with the apparent irrelevance ascribed to children, but which may have its links of reasoning could we enter into the juvenile mind, said with boyish satisfaction, though still eyeing me suspiciously, "I have two whips and a sword." I was quick enough to seize and put in practice the lesson. Self and selfishness must be habitually put away, if I would win his interest and love.

He soon accommodated himself to his new home when we went southwards, and at first divided his regard equally between Mary Rivers and me. By degrees my maternity prevailed, he called me his "pretty mamma," and Mary was regarded as his playfellow. Either she or Mr. Slater had so schooled him that he never once asked after his

father. Silence on that subject was not unnatural, for Mr. Elmore's long and frequent absences in his yacht or with his friends accustomed the child to be away from him. Yet he still retained a place in his affections. "May I say, God bless papa?" asked he, the second night after his arrival, while lisping his prayers at my knee. "God bless papa," I repeated after him, and from that evening both wife and child offered the petition together.

I had not forgotten to act upon Colonel Palmer's suggestion. Faintly and with wavering energy I began, but soon continued with steadiness and earnestness. The reward came quickly. All bitterness against my husband, as well as fretful murmurs, died away, and gave place to quiet serenity. I could think of him not only without dwelling on his faults, but, judging him more dispassionately, could discover merit I had previously overlooked. One quality, which I ought to have valued more highly, was a strong sense of justice; but this I persistently put myself out of a position to enlist in my favour, not knowing, and not caring to know, that, by a ready acknowledgment of the virtues of those we live with, we often benefit ourselves and them also, besides, in some cases, encouraging in them the cultivation of more. In my altered spirit, I was able to wish him happiness irrespective of myself. It would have been a source of real comfort to me to know that, forsaking the courses of pleasure and amusement in which he generally spent his time, he gave himself to any pursuit worthy of the energies of manhood. Time wasted or turned into a plaything now appeared to me unworthy of man or woman, robbing one of the dignity of action and the other of the charm of a benevolent influence. Of him I thought more in his character as an individual, and not with reference to his relationship with me. My deep love had spent itself; like a storm passed away, it left the atmosphere of my mind purer and clearer. His indifference had silenced the aching of my heart for his personal affection; perhaps I was so

far changed as to feel the insufficiency of any idol to give complete happiness to life; perhaps——no, I will not fathom deeper now than I did then. Poor Alice was not forgotten, nor the lessons learnt at her pillow. They yet had their influence, causing me to bear in mind that so long as existence lasts, it may be converted into a blessing for ourselves or for others, however lowering the clouds that threaten. A certain peacefulness settled down upon me. I would not permit myself to regard my life entirely as a useless isolation.

Yet I was not proof against the idea of being forgotten by the family with which I was connected, as an innocent remark from Percy one day revealed to me: "Percy's picture hangs by the side of papa when he was a little boy." I was puzzled. On making inquiries of the nurse, I found that his portrait had been taken by Lady Elmore's orders, and placed in the picture-gallery at the Beeches. The spaces were therefore all filled, and the prophecy my excited fancy read in Master Wenham's sinister countenance, the first time I visited the hall of my child's ancestors, was fulfilled. There was no place for me. I was excluded, not even thought of. To the calm and happy, my feelings about a circumstance so casual and trifling, must appear very foolish; I knew at the time that they were unreasonable, but my heart felt a sharp pang, and a few tears, salt and bitter, forced their way down my cheek.

My autobiography will be too long. I must hasten on, and deny myself the pleasure of lingering over some scenes which, even at this distant day, rekindle a feeling of interest.

The southern climate proved as good as its reputation. Both Percy and Mary Rivers derived benefit from passing the winter in its genial temperature on the shores of the Mediterranean. The summer came, tempting us to court the mountain breezes of Switzerland, where Mrs. Ewing and Colonel Palmer were to join us. After a few weeks spent together visiting various romantic spots, Mrs. Ewing

left, intent on some missionary scheme, and Mary was to make a short tour with her uncle.

It was a weak part of my character, never wholly overcome, that I did not adapt myself easily to solitude. With more heaviness than I ought to have felt, I saw Mary, my domestic sunshine, depart on her pleasure excursion, and endeavoured to obtain the last sight of her from the window. The situation obstructed the view; part of the carriage only was in sight, not herself. I turned away disappointed. A poignant sense of the difference between my lot and that of others came over me. I might for a while forget it, but never for long, there was ever some recurring drawback upon my efforts to be cheerful, something to remind me that I was alone—alone in heart and in ties, apart from others, unprotected, desolate. I ought not to murmur—even so I reasoned, but reason just then did not help me; instead, came a rush of emotion too strong for control; sinking into a chair, I hid my face and yielded to its power.

"Dear Mrs. Elmore, do not lose courage," said a kind voice near me. Colonel Palmer—who had forgotten a book and returned to fetch it—now stood before me, clasping it tightly in both hands. "Your friends have the grief of knowing that they can be of little use to you. We can only urge on you counsels which may sound cold if not heartless, yet it is all the help friendship is permitted to offer. Struggle to acquiesce in your trials. You will have all the needful aid if you seek it.

Not daring to speak, I moaned an assent.

"I wish we were better comforters," he added. "Mary shall soon return. Of this be sure, that even during our absence you will not be forgotten."

"I am thankful for your friendship—I ought to be stronger," I murmured, dashing away the tears of weakness with one hand and extending the other to him.

Was it the dewy veil before my eyes, or was it fact?—at first he appeared to hesitate about taking it. Imagination

it must have been, for as soon as his hand touched mine, he grasped it firmly, and looking kindly at me, repeated solemnly—"May the God of all comfort, comfort you—take you into His holy keeping in this life, and in the next present you faultless before the throne of His glory, for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord." He dropped it and was gone, leaving me under the influence of a comparative calm which followed his parting words. Calling Percy, I was soon able to join in his infantine games.

On their return I had recovered my serenity, and could enjoy the excursions in the neighbourhood undertaken especially for my benefit.

At the end of the autumn, Mary Rivers, Percy, and I, were again established in our pretty winter apartment in the south.

One fine morning at the close of October, feeling tired, I left Mary and Percy together in the public gardens and returned home. At the door I encountered a sailor, whose good-humoured face, notwithstanding the dark, sunburnt skin, showed so clearly the national type, that I could not mistake him for other than an Englishman.

"I have brought this for the young master," was his reply to the mute inquiry my countenance made, at the same time offering me a letter. It was directed to Percy, and in his father's writing. My breath came in gasps. What was going to happen? Nothing pleasant, of that I felt certain. Bidding the man wait, I passed into the drawing-room and read the following lines:—

"DEAR PERCY,

"Papa sadly wants to see his darling again, and will take him in his yacht for a couple of hours. Let the nurse come also. Swan, the bearer of this, will bring you both in a carriage to the port where papa is waiting to give Percy a sail.

"Your affectionate father,

"H. ELMORE."

My first thought on the perusal of this was to send for Percy, lock him up, and guard him as a lioness might her

young: my next was, what every woman at some hour of her life must feel—a sense of helplessness. I was powerless against one to whom law and society concurred to assign the stronger hand.

Feeling resistance useless, perhaps dangerous, I sent for Percy, and while the maid was busy getting herself ready, I brushed his curls and prepared him for the visit. His exuberant joy at the prospect before him distressed me. Though good and loving in a general way, his father appeared to be first in his affections, my maternal tenderness failing to gratify them completely. As he talked of the pleasure he was going to have, his voice assumed an unusual tone and his words a pseudo-manliness, which would have been absurd, had it not been painful.

"Remember that mamma cannot spare Percy long, that he must come back and take care of her. Poor mamma has none but Percy to love her," said I, as I put on his cap and gave the lingering, parting kiss.

"Yes, I shall tell papa," said the child, breaking from my embrace, and leaving me with a joy he was too young to dissemble.

"Surely he would not condescend to kidnap the child!" These were my anxious thoughts when Percy was gone, and being uttered aloud, Mary answered them with the remark, "Mr. Elmore could not do such a thing; he is a gentleman."

That was incontrovertible. Anything mean and unfair was inconsistent with his character. He might cancel his promise, he might withdraw his child from my care, but he would do so openly. I had no reason for suspecting him of stratagem. So said my reason, but an inner voice said something else. The incident which had so distressed me in Rome was a ghost not yet laid. If Mr. Elmore knew that his wife's name was on the police books, he might feel justified in withdrawing his son from her care, and, in order to avoid a scene, might adopt this quiet way of accomplishing his purpose. On referring to the letter I saw no mention

of Percy's return. The hours that went by had in them a cruel weight of pain and anxiety, for I felt oppressed by apprehension and the impossibility of resistance; self-condemnation at the injustice I had done my husband, mingled with a joy so deep as almost made me sick, when after a ring and a pause, I once more, before it grew dusk, heard the welcome voice in the passage.

Percy returned in high spirits, with a few sailor phrases, imperfectly pronounced, and a little rougher than was natural to him. Just before going to sleep, he surprised me by asking, "Why won't you like the sea, mamma?—papa says you don't."

With great self-control, or rather prudence, for I was afraid of hearing what might pain me, I abstained from all questions, and no more was said to me on the subject. Percy talked of his papa, the yacht, and the sailors to Mary Rivers for the next few days, and then they were gradually forgotten.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BLIGHTED BLOSSOM.

EVEN in the sunny south, days are sometimes dreary, partaking of the chequered pattern that runs through the lives of most of us. One sombre day near the end of January, a visitor's card was brought to me. On it was the unexpected announcement, "Mr. Norris, Holmewood." Before I had time to reply to the servant's question, "Would madam receive?" otherwise than by a heightened colour and an involuntary exclamation of surprise, the door opened wide, and, behind Mr. Norris, I caught sight of some fluttering drapery.

"We are on our way to Rome," began Mr. Norris. "I wished to see you, and my wife would not permit me to come alone. Ah! you look perplexed. No wonder. Give me your pity. I am a poor crestfallen fellow, with no more spirit than a babe—not so much, for that article has a will of its own and dares to show it, which I do not. There, come forward, little wife, and let Mrs. Elmore see the extent of my humiliation. Let her judge for herself how weak and pitiful a creature I have become, since I must confess to being governed by such a tiny sprite as you."

He moved his tall figure aside, and I recognised Lady Emily. In the sweetest of voices she spoke for herself. "I hope you will pardon the intrusion, but I was so anxious to see you that I would not let him come without me, nor wait for permission."

"She is a finished domestic tyrant. You may not easily believe it, yet what I say is the truth. I have been married

scarcely more than a month, and during that time I have been lectured and schooled, made to feel that my former opinions were all wrong, that I must distrust my own senses, and use another's. In fact, from a self-reliant man, I have degenerated into a mere echo—the slave of my lady's caprices. Nor you, nor any one, would have expected such a calamity to overtake Laurence Norris. Yet so it is. My wife wished to come and see you. I was obliged to bring her. She has given me private orders to leave her alone with you. What am I to do? I dare not disobey."

Here Mr. Norris assumed a rueful look of perplexity, while Lady Emily stood softly smiling until he had finished speaking, and then said, "That will do, Laurence; you need not tell any more fibs to-day. Mrs. Elmore has received me; it is for me to make my visit welcome. Now go away and come again in——" Turning to me with a graceful movement, she asked timidly, "Could you bear with my company for a whole hour?"

Taken by storm, I had no chance but to surrender. "Lady Emily does me great honour," I began stiffly, when Mr. Norris hastily interrupted—

"Tut! tut!—as much honour as she did me when she became my wife; she is only pleasing herself;" and with a saucy glance at her and a bow to me, he lightly touched my hand, tapped Lady Emily on the shoulder, and took himself away.

What a change had come over him! The cynicism which formerly took such pleasure in touching the weaknesses of others was gone; his manner was pleasant and agreeable, and his whole bearing indicated the elasticity of happiness.

Left alone with Lady Emily, I was puzzled how to commence conversation. Though personally all but strangers to each other, our histories were interwoven; I could not forget that she had been the cause of the most poignant sorrows and many of the faults of my married life. Whilst I was hesitating she took the initiative, and laying

her tiny hand upon mine, said sweetly, "Try to feel kindly towards me. You cannot think how often Laurence and I speak of you. I do so wish——"

Believing that she was about to offer her influence with my husband as a means of bringing us together again, I stopped her, almost uncourteously—"It is very kind of you, Lady Emily, to seek me. I thank you, more especially as this visit gives me the opportunity I might otherwise never have, of expressing my sincere regret for the insult I once offered you. Such is my sorrow, that had I the chance I would gladly make the reparation as public as the offence."

Lady Emily kissed me several times. To see the warmth of her manner and the coldness with which I submitted my cheek to her caresses, a looker-on might have reversed our positions, and taken her for the one to be forgiven. She was not at her ease—evidently disappointed. She found it more difficult to get on with me than she expected. I was impervious to her distress. My griefs and mortifications had come principally through her—such, at least, was the light in which I then viewed them. Her character, and my husband's oft-expressed esteem;—his early attachment to her, which, according to the housekeeper, exercised a salutary influence over his youth;—my bitter jealousy, and its mad demonstration;—my present lonely portion, contrasted with her happy prospects;—all this rushing over me, unhinged the balance of mind so laboriously acquired. I felt to dislike her, and hated myself for doing so. The only thing that made her presence tolerable was the fact that she was the wife of Mr. Norris. I liked him. I felt also that, being as it were by that circumstance taken out of my path, her virtues were not likely to be again cast in my face, nor measured against my faults. Numerous mortifying recollections maintained the unkind manner I adopted, impelling me, by cold, indifferent answers, to put aside every attack she made upon my feelings. By the time Mr. Norris

returned, I had arrived at the conclusion that I was the most hopelessly unamiable, ungrateful woman in the world. This conviction was considerably strengthened when, looking into Lady Emily's face, he exclaimed aloud—

"Why, what is this, little wife? You seem ready to cry!"

"With grief and vexation," replied Lady Emily, at once taking refuge within his strong arm. "I thought I could do a little good when my heart was so set upon it, yet I have not been able to persuade Mrs. Elmore that I am her friend, or for one moment to overcome her reserve. Help me, Laurence; I cannot leave her so prejudiced against me."

By this time I had come to my senses, and was sobbing heavily, with my head resting on my arms, which the table supported.

"Dear Mrs. Elmore," said Mr. Norris, "you must forgive me. I was a churl at Florence, being vexed with you for Lady Emily's sake, and she—commend me to her for gratitude!—was angry with me for yours. What can we do better than make it up all round, and unite our forces against the enemy?—I mean by that against your husband, who is worrying his friends, and himself too, by cavillings at home or frequent wanderings, instead of settling down into a respectable domestic man like myself."

"I cannot authorise any one to interfere between him and me," I replied stiffly, my pride taking alarm. "If any overtures are made, they must come from himself."

"Undoubtedly; but if they are made, will you reject them? That is the question Lady Emily wishes to ask, and has been revolving in her mind how to do so all the live-long hour you have spent together. It is a marvel to me how women manage to talk so much and say so little!"

Lady Emily here stooped down and whispered, "You may trust me. I will guard your feelings as I would my own. I am very angry with my cousin; he has greatly disappointed me," she continued, in a louder tone.

"Not me; I took his measure long ago," rejoined Mr. Norris.

Will it be believed that this sweeping condemnation gave me no satisfaction, that I turned from Mr. Norris' harsh judgment to the winning tones of Lady Emily with pleasure, and was won over to trust her?

"We leave in a few days, may I not come again before I go?" was her gentle request on quitting me.

Permission was gladly given. I am happy to add that I never again attempted to chill the warm interest which this truly excellent creature took in my welfare.

About this time, being the beginning of February, in the few formal lines which constituted my sole connection with my husband's family, I despatched to the Beeches the monthly certificate of the health and well-being of Percy.

A few days afterwards we saw the death of Lord Elmore in the papers, and by the next post a letter arrived addressed to Lady Elmore, in a handwriting not quite unfamiliar.

"Lady Elmore is never coming to pass her early widowhood with us!" observed I, with no small consternation. It was my first idea, and by no means a pleasing one.

"It may be that, being inclined to use her freedom and refresh herself by travelling, she intends to visit Percy on the road," suggested Mary.

"Perhaps; she might at least communicate with me before her letters are addressed to my house," said I; yet, greatly relieved at the idea of a passage and not of a visit, I threw aside the letter and thought no more about it.

My attention was soon otherwise taken up. My darling sickened. He became first restless, then mopy and unnaturally still, asking to be lapped and petted. In fear and anxiety I sent for medical advice, and hung upon the physician's words—

"A slight attack of gastric-fever. Don't be alarmed. I have

four similar cases on hand, and more serious. We shall soon bring the little fellow through this."

In a few days there was a change for the worst. The doctor came three times a day, and each time went away with a graver face; while the mother, stricken down with grief and fear, sat day and night beside the pillow whereon lay the little head, so dear and so changed. The soft curls were straight and limp, and the blue eyes, accustomed to express every varying mood, became either unnaturally bright or large and staring.

Ah me! I must have been crazed that night when, kneeling before the physician, I clasped his hands and entreated him to save my child, pouring out an incoherent tale of loneliness and misery. I was ordered to bed, to take composing draughts, and to be well watched. After a fruitless resistance I complied; my strength was going, and I feared that without taking some care of myself I should be unable to attend upon my child. Watson was to sit up with me, and the night-nurse engaged for Percy came backwards and forwards. In one of the intervals between sleeping and waking, I heard voices and my husband's name.

"What is the matter?" I asked, quickly aroused.

"Ought we not to send for Mr. Elmore?" asked Mary Rivers, who, having just had the latest news of Percy, had come to see if I were awake, feeling that something should be done.

Then, and not till then, I lost the last hope I had been cherishing; but in losing that I gained calmness. Only by preserving self-possession had I any chance of being allowed to retain my post at his pillow. Fearing that banishment from the sick-room might do me more injury than remaining, the doctor did not again order me away. Night and day my strength was taxed, and night and day it held out. I had no sensation of fatigue, only of a rigidity and dullness amounting almost to stupidity, and yet I saw that the little life was too visibly flickering. Would it die, or would

it rekindle, and bring back the only feelings of gladness my lonely heart was likely to know? According to our calculation, there had been time for his father to arrive, but he did not come.

One evening the doctor closed his visit giving that decided opinion which leaves a frightful anguish behind—"If he sleep he may recover."

Late into the night the restless tossing on the pillow continued. I was almost yielding to despair. I had sent Mary Rivers to bed, and remained to share the watch with the nurse. Soon came a pause in the restlessness—a longer pause, and then a stillness. We hoped he had fallen asleep. A feeling of relief followed, yet that was almost painful after the severe tension undergone—a trembling, not a realised joy. At the first glimmer of dawn he opened his eyes, now presenting their usual expression, and said, "Mamma, I love you. Take me in your arms. Papa will love you now, for I have asked God to make him." Though slowly, he spoke without effort. Looking triumphantly at the nurse, I was provoked at perceiving how coldly she regarded the improvement. When I took him in my arms as requested, he nestled to my shoulder, and lay for hours quiet and still, only his soft hair stirred by my breath as I pressed my lips continually to his forehead and cheek.

So passed the day, with little variation. He could not take anything, nor after those few words did he show any consciousness. The shades of evening gathered, deepened, and the lamp was lighted, its brightness subdued to the requirement of a sick chamber by a transparency.

My attention was for a moment diverted by unaccustomed sounds in the next room, and Watson almost immediately appeared with a card, saying, "The gentleman is in the drawing-room."

At a glance I read a name, not absolutely strange, yet not familiar—"Earl Granchester." "A friend sent by Herbert to inquire if the account of Percy's illness is true,

or if I have summoned him under false pretences," was the indignant thought that arose, and turning towards Mary Rivers, then sitting beside me, I asked her to receive him. "You can give the necessary information; I cannot be disturbed."

A minute more and the door opened again to admit no sylph-like form but a tall figure, whose dark outline even in the softened light showed the presence of a man. Looking up I recognised my husband, who, darting forward, would have taken Percy out of my arms, had not the nurse prevented, saying, "Hush! do not disturb him." The little fellow here opened his eyes, appearing to try and rouse himself.

"Lay him down, ma'am; you have had him all day, you must be tired."

"Not yet; I have still some strength left. I cannot part with him."

The nurse, finding expostulation useless, placed a pillow under my elbow to support it. Herbert, still silent, sat down on the untenanted bed, and, with his strong arm under the cushion, helped me to sustain the precious burden.

"Kiss me. It is getting very dark; is it bed-time? God bless papa and mamma," murmured the darling, and closed his eyes.

I pressed my lips to his. Was it selfish that, heedless of the feelings of the other parent, I would not yield my right or move my face from his? Some one, I think it was Herbert, tried to take him, but I resisted, saying vehemently, "He is my own—all I have! no one shall take him from me!"

"Lay him down, ma'am," repeated the nurse; "he will be more comfortable on the bed."

Before I could obey, there was a little sigh—another—yet another, and my child was with the cherub throng, whither I might not follow.

I found myself half led, half forced into the other room, where Mary Rivers took possession of me, and clasping and kissing my hands, did all she could to soothe and comfort me.

When next I observed Herbert, he was leaning against the mantel-piece with his face covered. I knew his grief must be great, all the affection he had being centred in Percy. Judging by results, and warped by his present sorrow, he might also blame himself for having permitted me to have the child abroad. I was therefore neither surprised nor angry that he addressed me for the first time in displeasure.

"Whatever may be your estimate of your own character and mine, of wrongs done and received, you have had your revenge. You sent for me too late even to bid my boy 'good-bye.' That painful satisfaction has been withheld from me. You might have spared me that aggravation. By trusting Percy to your care, I showed you more kindness than you have shown me. Probably you did not care for me to arrive in time."

Had I not felt too crushed and weak to reply, Mary Rivers would scarcely have left me the opportunity. Springing to her feet, and laying aside her usual gentleness, her face in a glow of indignation, she confronted him, saying—

"Shame on you, Lord Elmore! for the unworthy suspicion, and a double shame upon you that in such an hour of sorrow you can find nothing but injustice in your heart, and no kind word on your tongue to give to a bereaved and mourning mother—only reproaches as undeserved as they are unmanly."

He was not more amazed at this vehement address than I was, this habitually gentle girl thus suddenly transformed into a zealous—I feared an imprudent defender.

He came nearer. "If I am wrong, I beg her pardon. How long had my boy been ill before I was sent for?"

"There was time for you to arrive thirty-six hours earlier than you did; I have calculated," replied Mary.

"With no allowance for delay in the transmission of the message. Will either of you have the goodness to inform me how long my child had been ill before the telegram was despatched?"

Neither of us was disposed to answer; indeed I could not. On looking back it appeared a long while, but what with watching and grieving, my mind was not clear; besides, I felt weak and broken down, more inclined to submit to his reproofs than to justify myself. Not so Mary Rivers. Resenting his charges with a courage which astonished me, she first rated him soundly for his want of sympathy, and then argued upon the impossibility of a person of my character and principles being capable of indulging the passion of revenge. By the light the chandelier threw over him, I could see how little his opinion coincided with hers, yet as she repeated her assertions, the lines about his mouth softened a little, and he answered the lady, rather than her remark—

"My wife is fortunate in having such an enthusiastic friend."

"Believe it or no, we sent for you as soon as we saw danger," said Mary.

"As soon as you suggested doing so," said I. "Without you, it might not have been done at all, not from revenge, but because I never thought of it."

Herbert, who had come nearer and was listening with some attention, now retreated and took up his former position. My candour appeared to revolt him. As no one seemed inclined to speak further, Mary urged me to retire. Passing near Herbert in moving towards my room, I saw tears trickling through the fingers that concealed his face. He was suffering. Harsh as he had been, I could not leave him without a word, though by keeping himself aloof he showed no disposition to associate me in his trouble.

Pausing an instant before him, I said, "Good-night, Herbert," and without waiting for a reply, left the room.

"What time will you be able to receive a visit to-morrow?" asked Mary Rivers, opening my door almost as soon as it was closed.

"As early as she can," I heard Herbert say.

I appointed twelve o'clock, and laid my head that night on my pillow in a state of mixed emotions effectually preventing sleep; my heart now burdened by my sad bereavement, now feverishly speculating on the purport of the interview requested.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A PROPOSAL.

IT was late before I rose the following morning. I was not dressed until past twelve, when I sent Watson to inquire if Lord Elmore had arrived. She presently returned with the answer—"A gentleman has been in the house several times since ten o'clock, in that room giving orders. He is now there with François, but I do not think he calls himself by that name."

The household was naturally disturbed. Mary Rivers and Percy's nurse were gone out to purchase mourning, and no doubt many were coming and going. Opening the door leading into the salon, I looked in. Herbert was standing near the window, waiting. His face had a sorrowful expression, he appeared older, thinner, and less handsome. At the sound made by the closing of the door, he came towards me, and my step being weak and uncertain, he helped me by pushing forward a chair; then, taking another himself, sat down at the other side of a small table. The letter addressed to Lady Elmore was in his hand.

"You have never opened your letter," was his first observation.

"Mine! I thought it was intended for Lady Elmore."

"So it was; written by my desire, apprising you of my father's death. Where you had a special interest, you see I did not forget you." He said this with marked emphasis, then tossing the letter aside, added, "It is of no use now. The death of a distant cousin, whose only son died also a short time before himself, unmarried, taking place a few

days after that of my father, saves my mother from writing herself dowager. We have other matters to talk over at present. You are, I hope, prepared to hear that our little Percy must be taken to England and laid in the family vault."

He paused. I had not thought about it, but I had nothing to say. I was so broken down, no desire of any kind remained to me.

"The day of transmission will be for you to decide."

"For me!" I thought all trouble would be taken off my hands, and felt wearied at the bare prospect of responsibility. "Can't you do all that? I am incapable of making any decision."

"What you have principally to decide is, whether you will accompany me home, or continue to reside abroad. In the former case there must be some delay, for I cannot expect you to be ready to travel at a day's notice."

My brain was bewildered with sounds that for me had no distinct meaning. Was our long separation to end thus? and did these common-place words represent overtures towards a reconciliation? I could not believe that such was his intention.

Unwilling to give his question a signification not intended, I answered evasively, "I do not understand what you wish me to do."

"What do *you* wish to do?" he asked in reply, with a shade—not exactly of uneasiness, but of disturbance in his voice. "You will be very lonely now. I do not feel that I have the right to force upon you such a lot unless you desire it. Will you come home with me? Your present position you can estimate better than I can; but surely you will be happier at the head of an establishment, taking your proper place in society, and under your husband's protection, than alone."

The offer had really come. It was so far urged upon my acceptance, that the tangible advantages were recapitulated.

Though sensible that he seemed to desire my return, I felt neither pleasure nor triumph. Not the smallest degree did my pulse beat the quicker, nor my heart throb with satisfaction. The word that might have melted me, that might have stirred my frozen sensibilities into the tremor preceding a vibration towards genuine feeling, was not spoken. His face was sorrowful, his glance at me, as silence followed his interrogation, was inquiring, but neither hard nor tender. He wished me to accept the olive branch held out, that was evident, but the appeal was made to my reason and common sense. He would not put himself within the range of future reproaches by the utterance of a word capable hereafter of being construed into a profession beyond the truth.

"You have more to fear from the slights and opinions of the world than I have," he continued. "I advise you not to throw away the present chance of shielding yourself from its animadversions. It is not usually very tender towards the woman who is separated from her husband."

"I am so very spirit-broken, I should be a dull companion; you would soon weary of seeing such a melancholy face," I replied.

"Let not that consideration weigh with you. We have the same sorrow, and are united in *one* bond of sympathy at least."

My heart *then* gave a bound. What did it mean? My cold and careless husband almost condescended to persuade me, so gentle yet earnest were both voice and manner.

"I will return," I answered. It was my duty; I knew it, and dared not act contrary to its dictates. The language in which my consent was given might have been less laconic had I not remembered the false comfort formerly offered me by Mr. Slater, when he gave it as his opinion that the expensive habits of Mr. Elmore would not always permit him to forego the addition of £2,000 a year to his income.

"We are older than we were," continued Herbert: "let us hope that we are wiser also, too wise to expect that a long separation has developed in either of us any great amount of affection, devotion, and that sort of thing. I am prepared to show you the consideration a gentleman ought to testify towards his wife, and I ask the same from you. When I can gratify your wishes I shall be glad to do so. The liberty I claim for myself, so far as conventionality permits, will be yours also—freedom in the choice of your friends, and as little interference with your tastes and enjoyments as is compatible with your position in the household and county. If mutually attentive to these points, I see no cause for discord, no reason why we should not agree as well as other couples. I shall require you to welcome my guests and make the house agreeable to them, and consider it incumbent on me to do the same by yours. During the yachting season, I suppose you will not care to accompany me; you can visit your sister, or you—— in fact you will do as you please. I think there is nothing tyrannical about me; on the contrary, I am about as easy a character to live with as most men. I really feel that I am not offering a hard lot to any sensible woman."

This last sentence was most likely elicited by the dull expression of my countenance, as I realised the dreary domestic picture he was painting, in all good faith, as worthy of my acceptance. It was enough for him; I determined to make it enough for me. He had gained the day; we were about to start afresh, precisely on the terms which had so revolted me before, but with a difference—I was changed.

"I fear it will be some time before I recover my cheerfulness," was my reply, perceiving that he expected me to speak, and wishing to give a plausible excuse for my woebegone face.

"Time and your own efforts will do much. I do not think you feel the blow more than I do. We must get over

it somehow. Another thing, we must have no recrimination over the past. Never mind who was most to blame, pass a sponge over it all. If once we begin to exculpate or explain, farewell to every hope of a good understanding."

And so the broken bond was reunited, a mutual compact made, and I consented to try again an experiment which had formerly been unsuccessful. Herbert next referred to the business details of our great sorrow. Already I so far profited by the mutual agreement that I had a man's intelligence to stand between me and the worry of material arrangements.

"How soon can you be ready? Will you accompany me in a few days? If so I will wait for you."

I assented, feeling it better to make the effort than, by delay, run the risk of a colder cloud gathering over our new understanding. François could remain to settle everything, and Mary Rivers was better. Perhaps it would not hurt her now to return to England, or I might find a home for her until her uncle's arrival. Something of this I thought aloud, and drew from him the very natural question, "What have you to do with Mary Rivers?"

"She is a dear, kind girl, a sweet companion, but very delicate."

"In what way are you bound to her that she should control your movements?"

"She is a relation of some kind friends I made in Rome, given up to me at my particular request—the niece of a Mrs. Ewing and a Colonel Palmer, with whose family I was intimate."

The door of the chamber where lay my little one was here softly opened by the nurse, and Herbert immediately rose, saying, "If you wish to look upon Percy again, you must come now, or it will be too late."

I knew what he meant, and rose also. It was not difficult to sustain myself when resting in a luxurious chair, but when I stood up, my knees trembled; the fatigue undergone told,

as it was likely to do, upon one who lived more on energy than strength. Seeing me totter forward, he put out his arm and drew mine under his, and thus apparently united, drawn together for the moment by one powerful cord, we visited the mournful chamber, as far from all that true sympathy, where the heart's meltings fuse into each other, as the polar regions are to the torrid zone.

There lay my Percy, white and waxy as the camellias profusely scattered about him. He loved me in his way, and though he was gone, I knew I should have his love again—that God had taken it to plant and blossom where I should one day recover it in fresh and glorious beauty. At first I looked at him with the exultation this thought inspired, and then, like the wild gust sweeping down the tender flowerlet that had been trying to bloom in the sunshine, came the desolating recollection that all the love I was ever to possess on earth was gone! And my heart craved for it, thirsted for it then with an unquenchable longing. I meant to kiss him and go away, but the passionate grief, restrained during the recent conversation with Herbert, manifested itself in hysterical lamentations, which quickly brought the nurse to my side.

"Come away, dear lady; this is too much for you. You are weak and worn out," and with these words she strove to get me out of the room.

Herbert opened the door. It was significant of my state of mind, that in its keen anguish I clung to the hired attendant, and not to him, for commiseration and help.

No more admission into that closed room was permitted me. The door, by Herbert's orders, was locked against all not concerned in performing the services required.

On informing the doctor, when he came that afternoon to pay his visit of condolence, of my contemplated speedy return to England, I was surprised that he put an imperative veto upon it. Obliged to yield to his opinion that in the present state of my health I ought not to run the risk

of a sudden change of climate, I was constrained to refer him to my husband. Feeling that if bad for me, it would be worse for Mary, I was more than half reconciled to remain. To be unmindful of her, seemed like breaking faith with my best friend. Having consented to return, a couple of months later, would not, I imagined, be of any consequence to Herbert.

A familiar voice outside, and a tap at my door the following morning, startled me out of my lassitude. Expecting the dressmaker, I had slipped on a grey satin *douillette*, and was reclining in a *fautcuil* when my husband entered. My hair undressed was brushed backwards, and fastened with a ribbon to keep it out of my eyes. I had not breakfasted, and certainly did not expect a visitor. "My slippers, Watson." My feet rested shoeless on a stool, and Watson's trailing dress had just swept them across the room. One lay before Herbert. It was rather daintily made; formerly he was particular about my *chaussure*, and I had retained the habit of attending to it. He picked it up, and, surveying it with a smile, stooped as if to put it on—a service I would not permit him to render.

"You have not breakfasted, Una." Though so little sympathetic, we both fell into the use of the Christian name to which we had been accustomed. "Bring Lady Granchester's breakfast; I saw it preparing," said he, addressing Watson.

"Sir—my lord," stammered the bewildered girl. I, too, looked up in surprise.

"When wives send messages to their husbands, it is somewhat awkward not to know the correct name. To prevent a similar mischance—your doctor had some difficulty in finding me out." Saying this he laid before me a card, on which I read for the second time, "Earl Granchester." Regarding it, then him, puzzled and confused, I asked with hesitation, "Are you not, who then is Lord Elmore?"

"The last Lord Elmore lies there," was his serious reply, as he pointed in the direction of Percy's room.

I could only cover my face to conceal the shock received. Time was that I had been ambitious, that as Una Randolph I had desired this world's honours and dignities. More than my highest anticipations had descended upon me. Where was my satisfaction? In sorrow I turned from them all, esteeming the humblest peasant, blessed with the love of husband and child, a creature to be envied! What a mockery it may sometimes prove to sit down before the realised dreams of our youth!

After a while Herbert spoke. "The object of your doctor's visit yesterday was to forbid your return home until the weather is warmer. That being the case, I have no reason for delaying my departure. As all the necessary arrangements can be completed to-day, I shall leave to-morrow morning. It is not for me to oppose your medical adviser. I must own that I have no very inviting home for your reception. Granchester Park is in a state of dilapidation, the former Earl having been a hypochondriac for many years, and very poor besides. My mother wishes to remain at the Beeches, and I am not inclined to oppose her wishes. Perhaps you will be equally willing to give it up to her."

As he paused for my answer, I could only agree, and said I was very willing for Lady Elmore to live at the Beeches if she desired it.

"There will be enough to do to make one house comfortable for us," observed he, rising. He was going away.

"When shall I see you again?" I ventured to ask.

"This evening; I will look in after dinner."

It occurred to me that if reconciled, it was strange that we should dine apart. "Perhaps we dine too early for you?" I said, doubtingly.

"Thank you; I dine at my hotel, but I will see you afterwards."

For a few minutes I heard his voice in the next room

talking to Mary Rivers, and was not surprised to hear her say when he left that she thought him indescribably agreeable. Though by no means what is termed a lady's man, he exercised over them a powerful fascination whenever he chose to exert it.

The evening was advanced when Herbert entered. He came to the sofa where I was, and sitting beside me, began to speak of his intended journey the next day. My appearance all at once seemed to strike him.

"This is not your general health, only the result of your late fatigue and anxiety?"

"Mrs. Elmore has not been strong all this winter," said Mary, taking the reply upon herself.

"Mrs. Elmore is no more, and is to be forgotten," answered Herbert, taking one of my hands and holding it up to the light. The catechising was not yet over.

"What mark is that I saw upon your forehead this morning?"

"A cut from a fall," I replied, foolishly colouring.

I think he suspected its history, for he asked no further questions. He shut within his own the hand he had been examining, and kept it there till he went away. He had not promised me affection, nor did I wish to offer more than duty. Mary's opinion of him somewhat alarmed me. I was strong now; but if when within the circle of his influence I again yielded to its magnetism, what chance had I of pursuing the noiseless tenor of my way in peace and contentment?

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE NEW HOME.

IN the beginning of May I was in Paris. Lord Granchester had accompanied me so far on the journey home, but, being detained by indisposition, he was obliged to leave me, having some business on hand requiring his presence in England. When sufficiently recovered I was to follow with my servants. Colonel Palmer met us by appointment, as it had been arranged that Mary Rivers should return to him. Finding that I was obliged to remain without Lord Granchester, he kindly prolonged his stay and permitted Mary to bear me company. The meeting between my husband and friend was more to me than an exercise of curiosity; I wished to know how they estimated each other, more anxious really to ascertain what the latter thought of the former than what Herbert thought of him.

The only interest my husband testified consisted in identification. "Are you the Colonel Palmer of Holly Bush?" was an early question, leading to the following colloquy:—

"The same."

"Is it not some years since you lived there?"

"I can never be said to have lived there," replied the Colonel. "Before taking my wife to India I rented it for a short time, and liked the place so much that I left instructions with my man of business to purchase it, if ever it came into the market. Being near my sister, the locality had an additional attraction for me. Circumstances are

changed since then, but nevertheless when the offer was made, I gladly became the purchaser."

After a courteous observation about the pleasure of having him for a near neighbour, Herbert said, "A friend of mine has cast covetous eyes upon Holly Bush. He thinks it a nice shooting-box, and would like to become your tenant whenever you do not care to occupy it yourself."

"My present intention is to keep it as a *pied-à-terre.* I have no idea of letting it."

"Does your sister live at Granchester?" asked I, with eagerness.

"Yes; my brother-in-law is the vicar."

This was good news, indeed. Logically, it did not follow that his relations were of the same stamp as himself—practically, I knew of an exception in Mrs. Leeson; but there was hope. This sister was evidently a favourite. At any rate, I was not going into a neighbourhood of total strangers.

Afterwards, on privately inquiring of Herbert what sort of people were the vicar and his wife, I was not discouraged by the answer—"Good sort of people, I believe; I have seen but little of them."

His "good sort of people" might take higher rank in my estimation than they did in his. I thought it more than probable that to me they might be agreeable. Bound to receive his friends, I was not obliged to like them. His bachelor-life for more than three years, going hither and thither with his yacht and his friends, was not likely to bring the latter within the circle most sympathetic with me. It was therefore a great pleasure to learn that the friendship, from which I had derived so much benefit, would not only be continued, but perhaps widened by intercourse with other members of the family. If the high standard followed by Colonel Palmer was also possessed by his sister, there would be within my reach two minds superior to my own,

from which, when needed, I might seek encouragement or counsel.

"How fortunate I am in having you for a near neighbour!" said I one day to Colonel Palmer, as I sat with him and Mary under the shade of the trees in the Tuileries —I was then well again, and going to leave the following morning—a compliment which, to my surprise, met with a cold "Thank you," whilst his eyes were turned another way. He did not respond as I expected.

"Never, never let Holly Bush, I beg of you. Take Mary for your little housekeeper, and settle there always. It will be so pleasant. I never expected such a piece of good fortune. Only think of your being our nearest neighbour!" Quickly changing the gay mood in which I was speaking for a graver one, I added, "I am not like the glorious woman of whom you told me; far from helping others, I require so much aid myself. Even yet I shall often be groping in the dark, unless some one guide me."

"So should we all," he replied, with his natural manner. The cloud, however caused, was gone. "Few are as favoured as Lady Granchester, to whom it is permitted to begin a second life with the experience of a first. With all my heart, I hope it will prove a happy one. It is well to begin with the conviction that satisfactory results proceed from good practice, and not, as many of us fancy, from good intentions and feelings. I regret that Mary will not be with me at Holly Bush, not at least for some time, as her Aunt Leeson wants her; and Mary is too unselfish not to be willing to carry her little lamp of oil where it is most required."

"And when I need it?" I asked.

"Then she will come to you, and be very selfish, for the visit will give her the greatest pleasure;" an assertion which Mary heartily confirmed.

The day I reached Granchester was fine, the time about five in the afternoon. A handsome, old-fashioned barouche

was at the station, waiting I felt sure for me, the livery slightly resembling that used at the Beeches. In vain I looked around for Lord Granchester, whom I expected to meet me. A gentlemanly-looking man, in black, was lounging against the doorway when the train stopped, who, on my quitting the train, came forward and presented to me a letter, addressed to the Countess of Granchester. Herbert had sent his own man with a few lines from himself, expressing a fear of not being able to conclude an engagement in time to meet me at the train. He hoped, however, to be at home before my arrival at the house. Without weighing the apology as I should formerly have done, dwelling upon some word or turn of expression I did not quite like, I entered the carriage, and was soon on my way to my new home.

How much or how little shall I say of Granchester Park? Though willing, for the events of my life, "to point a moral," I am not careful to mark the locality with too great precision. A general description will better suffice for the object I have in view.

Granchester was a huge, red-bricked Elizabethan mansion, more imposing than attractive, with a long façade of many windows in front, flanked on each side by half circles of projecting masonry, forming large bay windows; situated within a long drive of the town of Oxford, and in the county of Buckingham. Timber, as I understood the term, abounded—that is, there were old, lofty trees towering in every direction, not only overshadowing a gloomy avenue, but in groups over a large extent of domain, whether valuable, or only the untouched growth of many years, my unpractised eye could not determine. On entering the house, a wide stone hall, flagged with square, brown stones, much worn, and in some places cracked, made a cheerless impression, notwithstanding the handsome stag's-heads, with their antlered honours, adorning it. Horns and old implements of chase were everywhere, with other signs of

antiquity interesting to those who cared for feudal reminiscences. To me the prevailing impression was one of gloom—a sombre, uninviting home for one who had so lately been basking in a southern sunshine. Several doors opened into this hall, which I had only time to remark when the central one was thrown open, and I entered a carpeted inner hall, flooded with golden light from some painted glass opposite. A large door was open and led to a spacious lawn, where flower-beds and baskets, trees and shrubs, benches and chairs, met the eye. Several doors were in this hall also. One was ajar, and as the solemn butler conducted me towards it, some black drapery fluttered inside. Awed, in spite of myself, at the dead silence, I was longing for Herbert or for some one to appear and break it, when the dark robing came forward, and I recognised Lady Elmore. No doubt she intended to give me a kind welcome, though her stately salute and condescending politeness were not suggestive of any great cordiality.

"And Herbert?" said I, looking round, feeling that a presence possessing more life than the Dowager testified was absolutely necessary if I would not disgrace my return home by sitting down and indulging in a good cry.

"Granchester had an engagement, or he would have met you himself. I expect him every minute."

His new dignity, so perceptibly agreeable to her, had no attractions for me. To me he was Herbert. Associated with that simple name was my first tie to him, belonging as it did to that fervid affection which, though passed away, had a certain tenderness lingering about its memory.

These first impressions of Granchester alarmed me. If Herbert went no farther than his promise—if domestic life meant for him going and coming as he liked, seeking his own pleasure, and leaving me to do the same—I knew that I had entered upon a cruel bondage, and that even the presence of my kind and valued friend, a deeper knowledge of the obligations of duty, with a desire to fulfil them super-

added, and the freedom of action which I might claim, would be insufficient to content me. I did not wish ever again to be the prey of an ill-regulated affection, but I did desire some kind of fellowship, some central lines of thought and feeling to bind our two natures into an harmonious whole—a nearer union than one of which a commonwealth of worldly interests would constitute the principal bond. Should I ever find in my new home a sympathetic hand extended to mine—should I ever feel the warm clasp, telling of a community of hope and care in those emotions we so often feel, yet seldom intelligently clothe in words? I dared not trust myself to ponder over the doubt. Lord Granchester, as Lady Elmore twice informed me, might arrive any minute; what would be his opinion of the good sense to which he had appealed if I received him with tears?

The style and furniture of the room served to distract attention from thoughts, which, in spite of myself, assumed a sombre colouring. Though now faded, it had been handsome, and might have dated back three or four generations. More pretentious at first sight, but really poor, it was far less comfortable in character than the Beeches. I could but wonder by what complication of circumstances Herbert, fastidious, luxurious, and extravagant as he was, had been willing to take up his abode in a place so uninviting. However indicative of ancient descent Granchester might be, for my part I should have preferred, a hundred times over, our former modern house in Upper Grosvenor Street, with the solid adjuncts of wealth, or even my father's cockney villa at Ryde, to its large baronial halls.

While making these reflections, interrupted occasionally by some measured remark from Lady Elmore, which I was obliged to answer, a slight noise occurred in the hall. The door was quickly opened, and my husband entered, his old sunny look for the first time lighting up his countenance.

"I am sorry it has so happened, Una. My mother has,

I hope, explained that I was unavoidably engaged and could not meet you. It had been my intention to join you in town yesterday, and accompany you here to-day." He looked vexed as he spoke, and gave me a warmer reception than I expected. "Granchester looks dreary, does it not? I much regret not being at home to receive you. First impressions go a long way."

When, for the third time, he expressed himself in a similar strain respecting his absence, Lady Elmore's dignity was wounded. "You seem to forget that I was here, and that I am not likely to omit the attention due to my son's wife."

"True," answered Herbert, addressing me. "My mother has given a good deal of time and care to prepare for your return, that is, to put your rooms into a condition a little in accordance with what you have a right to expect. Would you like to see them?"

As I assented to the proposition, he led the way up a broad, oaken staircase, which creaked as we walked, and terminated on a landing large enough to be called a gallery. Opening a door opposite, we entered a vast room, corresponding to the hall below and full of windows, from which were seen the handsome lawn before mentioned, and a fine view beyond. A large belt of dark trees was to the right, with the church spire tapering above. As below, so here, were many doors.

"Those," said Herbert, pointing to the left, "lead chiefly to the apartments of the late Lord Granchester, most of them too neglected to be used as they are, and I am too poor to repair them; these," indicating another direction, "are for the use of visitors, and those at the west end are principally yours."

Pretension, mixed with faded wealth, characterised the few to which I was introduced, until Herbert turned the handle of another door, prefacing the action by the remark, "For any pet visitor of your own;" and I went into a small but very pretty sleeping-room, fitted up in a modern fashion with taste and elegance.

Adjoining was the apartment meant for me, consisting of three pieces, all furnished in a style which had no counterpart in the rest of the house. The first was a boudoir, hung with blue satin bordered in silver, with *fauteuils* and *causeuses* to match, forming a small octagon; and next was a sitting-room, differently, but equally well-furnished in amber; and beyond was a large bedroom, with Herbert's dressing-room opposite. This was connected, by a narrow, spiral staircase, with a room below, which he termed his working-room—a complete misnomer, for I found it fitted up as luxurious as mine—furnished for ease and enjoyment, and completely out of character for such work as brings country gentlemen in contact with bailiffs, agents, and stewards. My sitting-room was especially cheerful. The central window opened upon a balcony, or *perron*, as it might be more correctly styled, from whence a flight of stone steps, on each side, descended to the lawn.

Lady Elmore having accompanied me throughout my visit to the apartments, was pleased to express satisfaction at the gratification I testified. If the rest of the house appeared to wear a chilling aspect, this end was a bijou, combining both taste and comfort, so well arranged that while my privacy was secured, I could enjoy the grounds, go out and come in when I chose, without the necessity, except at my own pleasure, of encountering the company that might be staying in the house.

"I am glad you are pleased," remarked Herbert. "My mother has taken some trouble, and would have been disappointed had it been otherwise."

"I merely assisted Granchester. Whatever trouble there may have been, if you admit such a word into the question, was his," returned the lady, with dignity.

I looked up with grateful thanks in my eyes, when his answer made me cast them down more quickly than I had raised them.

"And the payment must be from herself, for I know not

where else the money is to come from," replied he, with a candour that grated sorely, until he added, reading perhaps the shock my sensitiveness received—"Since these articles were ordered, an agent connected with this property has absconded with £6,000 in his pocket.

This money question had formerly been my bane, and would be so still, if I did not learn how to meet it. The best thing was to admit at once the idea that Mr. Slater had put before me. My father's careful provision might be —most probably was—the magnet which had again drawn me within the circle of my husband's home. As I understood the terms on which I had returned, it did not much signify; I could vegetate there as well as elsewhere, and should have more liberty to mourn or train my spirit according as Percy's sweet image, or the hope of reunion, might be the dominant feeling.

"The dinner is at seven o clock, my usual hour; and we have no visitors," said Lady Elmore, as she went away leaving me alone, Herbert having already disappeared down the steps conducting to the lawn.

"Would you like to make acquaintance with the park and village? If so I will drive you in the basket-carriage this morning; you will see how you like it; I bought it, thinking the old barouche—the only vehicle not absolutely crazy which Lord Granchester possessed, except his invalid-chair—would be little to your taste. By and by you may like to have something else; I leave that to you."

This was said by Herbert as we left the breakfast-room the following morning. I wished to go with him, and at the appointed time was ready for the drive. After going down the avenue overarched by fine old elms, whose vigour had long since yielded here and there to the encroachments of decay, instead of going towards the road as we might have done, we first skirted and then crossed the park, reaching the village by another lodge, near the dark belt of trees

before noticed. Close by stood the church, a grey, venerable pile, with some Saxon architecture still about it, notwithstanding many uncouth reparations; and further on, by the road, but nearer to the park than to the village, was the Vicarage—only a short walk from the house through a shrubbery. Traversing the green, where some children were at play, we stopped before a pretty little cottage, hidden away by thick elderberry and other shrubs.

"This is an indispensable visit for you, if you expect to be a popular Countess of Granchester," said Herbert. "I am taking you to see Mrs. Jenkins, who has been housekeeper at the Park for nearly half a century. She is too old-fashioned, as well as weak, for the work we shall have for her; I have committed, in her eyes, the heinous sin of telling her so, and of taking another in her place. The pension assigned her has done nothing to appease her indignation; I shall never be forgiven. These offences having been perpetrated before your arrival, she may confine her angry animadversions upon the 'new folk' to me, and not include you. She looks upon herself as having more right to the old place than I have. Be as kind to her as you can; try and redeem my faults in her estimation. It was necessary to remove her, but really I never thought to irritate her as I have done. Her notions date back a couple of centuries, at least. No entertainment has, I suspect, been given at Granchester for the last twenty or perhaps thirty years."

He must have understood my glance at the deep mourning I was wearing, for he added, "I am not thinking of general society, but the friends I shall have about me will require a different table from what Mrs. Jenkins could furnish. Sir Mark Wentworth would, I know, think himself hardly used if condemned to that."

Sir Mark Wentworth, I remembered, was the man who had cast longing eyes upon Colonel Palmer's little snuggery; perhaps that was the reason I was inclined to dislike him,

and never pleased to hear my husband so often refer to him.

"For her own sake, win the old lady into good-humour. Why should she be unhappy at a change that really cannot be helped?"

He handed me out of the carriage as he finished speaking, and we entered together at the open door.

"I have brought Lady Granchester to see you," said Herbert, in what sounded to me a most conciliatory tone, as we went inside a neat little room, where everything was in the greatest order, but the most orderly of all was a little woman about seventy years of age, with a mob cap and spectacles, the very pink of cleanliness. She rose, laid down her knitting, made a curtsy, and then offered me a chair.

"This is Lady Granchester's first visit," said my husband. I really took this careful condescension to Mrs. Jenkins as a good omen. Herbert used not to be so considerate of the feelings of others.

"I am greatly beholden to her ladyship," replied the little woman, turning her spectacled eyes upon me with a scrutiny which though short was sharp. Resuming her knitting she said, without looking up, "I hope my lady will be happy here; it is many a long year since the place had a mistress—forty-three year come Michaelmas. After she died, poor lady, there was no other. To some this place is very dull, none of the new sort of servants like to stop," and here she cast a meaning glance at my husband. "The old lord was ill, leastways he thought so, and we all lived too quiet for them."

"We shall alter all that," said Herbert; "we are young and not ill at all. We mean to do our duty to our neighbours in a better way than by shutting ourselves up. I shall yet see you leading a country dance in the old hall."

The ex-housekeeper glanced furtively at me. I was thinking of Percy, and did not feel very happy. The future

had none of these bright pictures for me, nor was there anything in my surroundings suggestive of the cheerfulness Herbert was anticipating. The old lady certainly appeared more pleased with my dull countenance than with Herbert's sunny one.

"The Lord love you, and bless your pretty face! Pardon the freedom of an old woman, who belongs to the family, like. It would do my heart good to see it smiling in the old dining-room. As I can't be there, maybe I shall sometimes see it here," said Mrs. Jenkins, following us to the door.

"You have made a conquest," said Herbert, laughing, as we resumed our seats in the carriage. "My good looks go for nothing; she scarcely looks at me, and hardly ever rises from her seat when I go into her cottage. She persists in calling me 'the new folk;' the term must be meant for me alone, as my mother has never set foot inside her door."

Beyond the belt of trees was a line of water, not an artificial piece for ornament, but a river—a real river, with a strong current at times. It flowed through the property for some distance, and then meandered away through the far-off meadows. Just then it gleamed brightly in the sunshine, the first object attracting my eye as we left the cottage. Mrs. Jenkins' simple tenement and that flashing coil, presenting then its silver trail so distinctly, who could suppose they would ever unite in tracing one of the most unexpected pages of my history!

The drive over, we were returning to the house, when Herbert started a new subject. "Una!"

"Yes."

"If my mother says anything to you about Percy's life having being sacrificed by living abroad, don't take it to heart. I am not of her opinion, but it is better not to contest it; you cannot alter a fixed idea; if wrong, the the blame lies with me. Conciliate her if you can." This

was the second time Herbert had unintentionally shown a painful recollection of the past. Very certain it was he had no faith in any fundamental change in my character.

My duties as mistress were not heavy. The new housekeeper was young and clever, already trained to the superintendence of the establishment, and more eager to please me than Lady Elmore.

For one week we three lived harmoniously together; that is, there was no discord, though it cannot be averred that any pleasing melody ran through the current of our days. Lady Elmore was not sorry to see me return; it was my proper place, and my dignity, as her son's wife, was better maintained at Granchester than by wandering abroad; yet there was little more than conventional politeness between us. The attempt I made to go deeper, by expressing my pleasure at her continuing at the Beeches, failed. "It was Granchester's doing," was the stiff answer, convincing me that the offences I had formerly given were not to be condoned by any subsequent attention. On one occasion, when, thinking she might like to ask some questions concerning those last sad scenes of his short existence, I purposely named Percy's illness, she pressed her lips tightly together and looked as if exercising so much painful self-restraint, that I never gave her another chance.

Poor woman! she was more to be pitied than myself. The blight with her had fallen upon her whole life, not only destroying "the gentle charities," which, like the fragrant perfume exhaled from the flower, comes back in balmy air to refresh and nourish the giver, but I never heard her express a hope or a longing for a happier or more purified future.

The Vicar and his wife called. I found them friendly and sympathetic, their society promising—as yet the most agreeable prospect which Granchester afforded.

At the end of a week my husband went away for a short

time, and then began my life as it was to be. Frequent absences and sudden returns, accompanied or followed by gentlemen-friends, I having for a time obtained exemption from the task of entertaining ladies. My deep mourning the excuse, I was permitted to live as retired as I pleased, Herbert's guests contenting themselves with providing their own amusements.

After a prolonged visit, during which, somewhat I think to my husband's surprise, Lady Elmore and I never disagreed, she returned to the Beeches.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

BÊTE NOIRE.

GRANCHESTER being only a few hours distant from Oxford, and still less from the barrack-town of W——, where my husband had friends and acquaintance, and not quite half a day from London, whence visitors were frequently coming, we were seldom alone when he was at home. I saw no pleasure in their general round of amusement. For me, the truth of the French sarcasm, "que les Anglais s'amusent tristement," was patent. They had good dinners, good wines, made excursions, played billiards, and sometimes had boating at Oxford, all which Lord Granchester seemed to enjoy. He was good enough to accept the plea of my recent bereavement for the almost mechanical manner in which I performed my part. After all, our apparent reconciliation was a bargain. I was Lady Granchester—I headed his table, received his friends, lived under his protection, added my income to his, and met with general consideration. One of the first things I did on settling at Granchester was paying into his banker's account the greater part of my money, reserving only a modest sum for personal expenses.

Of what could I complain? Herbert was not exacting, certainly far from tyrannical—always courteous, with an ineffable refinement, easy to live with where the reason rather than the heart demanded its gratification. He was not unkind, for he never opposed me; not kind, for he took no trouble about me; not harsh, not even negligent in manner. A long list of negatives might be employed in

the description. On my side was a careful study not to vex him; knowing his weaknesses, I was attentive never to touch them. I suffered him to go his own way, and asked no questions. If he told me of his engagements, well—if he did not, I was silent. I wearied him with no regrets for his absence, no pressings for a speedy return. By our compact, as I understood it, I abided, believing that I had no part in the warm pulsation we call affection—that perfumed flower without which, to the tender spirit, the eye sees no beauty, the ear hears no melody, in the fairest scenes that may be sparkling around.

"Human beings," it is said, "can accommodate themselves to life in any form." That may be true. The daily journals occasionally bring startling facts in corroboration, revealing unfathomable depths of human misery and degradation. We are forced to acknowledge, though with reluctance, that a time may come when the captive loves his prison bars better than the free air, and the lunatic is attached to his den.

If I could not like my life at Granchester, it might, in a measure, be my own fault. Restless yearnings and longings I could not still were ever rising and working, though in the main I struggled to resign myself to the exigencies of the situation I had accepted. My nature was nervous—what some call finely strung—one of those which, disappointed in its exactings, unless watched with religious care, would be likely to sink into morbidness when it ceased to struggle, instead of bending its faculties to the creation of a contented and useful life. Without quarrelling with my lot, I was not in harmony with it. Yet I was free to please myself more than most wives, had I known how to set about it. I might crowd my favourite visitors into the house when he was absent. I had liberty to the full, but knew no use for it.

Lord Granchester rarely failed in any conventional politeness—nay more, he sometimes forestalled my wishes. I

ought to have been satisfied, but I was not; I ought not to have been unhappy, but I was—secretly and silently. My only real pleasure consisted in visiting the Vicarage, or in the Stanleys visits to me. When Colonel Palmer arrived at Holy Bush, matters were a little improved. He was preparing it for his residence; it had to be newly-papered and furnished, and became a subject of interest both to the Stanleys and to me.

It was afternoon in the beginning of August, very warm and sultry in the open grounds, but not unpleasant under the foliage of that broad belt of trees already described as leading to the church and village. A narrow path diverged, conducting to a small door in the wall surrounding the park, which, in the latter days of the late Lord Granchester, had been made to facilitate Mr. Stanley's visits by economising his time. By my desire this was kept unlocked, so that I had ready access to my friends and they to me. Many an hour I spent pleasantly at the Vicarage. Returning thence this warm afternoon, I was surprised to see my husband on the lawn, he having only left me the day before, and still more to recognise in the gentleman to whom he was talking, the stranger of Pisa.

How can we explain the working of those secret springs within us by which we are irresistibly impelled to like one human being and dislike another, when we must utterly fail in attempting to give any satisfactory reason for the repulsion or attraction? The former feeling I now experienced, quite as much as I had done at first sight, when the new comer was presented to me as Herbert's friend—Sir Mark Wentworth. Nor was the prejudice diminished by the great pleasure he expressed at meeting me under circumstances permitting him to improve the acquaintance. There was the same bold stare, the same self-satisfied manner, little deference, but instead, a visible determination to please himself. Whatever qualities he might have making him agreeable to his own sex, he was entirely

devoid of the refinement which is generally a passport to the favour of ours. His very attire was against him—his coat loose and ill-fitting, and all about him betokening a personal negligence, made more conspicuous by the taste and harmony pervading Lord Granchester's appearance. He made an excellent foil, had that been necessary.

"Is that a favourite resort?" asked Sir Mark, pointing towards the dark trees. "They look very inviting."

"It is a short way to the Vicarage," was my answer.

As soon as I could with propriety make my escape, I left Sir Mark and Lord Granchester together, and went up the steps to my own apartment. Later, perceiving the Baronet smoking on the lawn alone, and supposing Herbert to be in his room downstairs, I entered by the window.

The Vicarage party were coming to dinner, and I wished to apprise him of it. He was standing near his writing-table; a few open letters and papers had been thrown down before him, and some were lying yet unopened. At the rustle of my dress he turned round. "You want something, Una."

"To speak to you."

In a moment the most comfortable chair was drawn forward, the letters pushed on one side, and he was all attention. A reception less courteous would have pleased me better. A kind clasp of the hand, though bid to wait and allowed to stand, would have drawn the heart of a loving woman much nearer; but he promised me consideration, and evinced it by a scrupulous politeness. Let me hope that I performed my part as conscientiously.

"I came to tell you that some friends have been invited to dinner to-day."

"Ah! the Stanleys, I suppose. You know that you have a right to ask your friends."

"Yes; the Stanleys and Colonel Palmer, and his aunt, Mrs. Ewing," I answered.

"Colonel Palmer was not here when I went away; when did he come?"

"He has often been here for a day, and has twice left his card for you. You happened each time to be away."

"I did not know it—perhaps I overlooked his card. Why did you not tell me?" He turned, and looked at me.

Circumstances were exactly as I stated; it was an entire chance that Colonel Palmer had called on the days he was absent. I had talked of the great kindness received from him and his family in Rome, and made no secret of the value I set upon their friendship, and yet I could not meet that look without blushing; why, I cannot tell, except from some confused notion that the Baronet might create a false position between us. Another thing made me uncomfortable, though it was a mere trifle. At the Vicarage we had been sitting in council upon the paper to be chosen for the drawing-room at Holly Bush, and not being agreed on the pattern, specimens were to be brought to the Park and the selection made that evening, when the effect had been tested by lamplight. This seemed but a simple act of neighbourliness among persons so intimate, yet I was not sure how my fastidious husband would regard it, though professing to leave me free in the employment of my time.

"Mrs. Ewing will not, I fear, please you," was the next thing I said. "She is peculiar, what you may think eccentric—odd, I may say shabby, in her appearance; but she is a good woman, very clever, and I love her."

"That last clause is high praise," said Herbert, with, as I fancied, a shade of sarcasm in his tone; "but I do not promise to love those you love." Here he took up another letter, and I, having nothing more to say, was leaving when he stopped me, and by turning quickly round we stood face to face. "I was going in search of you as soon as I had finished reading these letters," he continued, glancing at them while he was speaking, at the same time keeping me

under strict observation. "I have no doubt you are expecting to hear of our yachting plans. We go later than usual this year. I fear we shall be some time away. Most probably I shall go to Cowes the day after to-morrow."

If he expected to see any sign of the old temper, or to hear any remonstrance, he ought to have been agreeably disappointed. I heard him in silence, with an unvarying expression of acquiescence, which, if it did not cover indifference, had all the appearance of it.

"Your friend, Sir Mark, goes with you?" I said, not that I cared who went, but wanted to say something to show that I offered no opposition.

"Yes; he and Tredegar."

I slipped away, and went to my room, too plunged in personal reflections to think any more of the papers, which, while below, I resolved to tell Mrs. Stanley not to send.

Etiquette required that I should take Sir Mark's arm, and give him the post of honour at the table; it did not, however, exact that I should give him much attention, nor was I likely to be particularly gracious when the conversation of Colonel Palmer and Mrs. Ewing was within my reach. The sneer on Sir Mark's face whenever the subject took a serious colouring, did not improve my opinion of him—it was only what I expected; but I was pleased to observe that my husband threw no discouragement in the way of topics not usually discussed at his table when he was present. He did cast an amused glance at me when the diminutive lady, not more than four feet high, entered the room on the arm of her tall, distinguished-looking nephew; but I could not complain of her reception. His friend had not met with equal kindness at my hands.

After dinner, Mrs. Stanley asked for the papers. Whilst employed in examining them, and trying the effect by holding them against the wall, the gentlemen came from the dining-room.

"Which is it to be?" "What means this upholstery?" were the questions asked—the one by Mr. Stanley, the other by Sir Mark.

"I never imagined that you would have had this performance to-night," said Colonel Palmer to me in an under tone. He was always alive to the fitness of things, and did not approve of what we were doing.

"Mrs. Stanley wished the choice to be made; I did not like to refuse," I replied, softly. Meanwhile, Sir Mark, by a couple of direct questions, made himself acquainted with the meaning of this unexpected display of paperings, and blurted out his opinion.

"And what does Lady Granchester say?" said one of the ladies. I chose one which had not found favour with the others—buff and gold; it was not striking, but it pleased me.

"You will take that, of course," said Sir Mark, pointing to the one I had selected. "A fortunate fellow you are to inspire so much interest. I would paper my room with elephants, if Lady Granchester did me the honour to choose them."

The term "fortunate fellow," applied to one of Colonel Palmer's quiet dignity, angered me. I looked up quickly, not, I fear, very amicably at the speaker, and met my husband's eye riveted upon me from the opposite side of the room. "Which do you prefer?" asked I, addressing him.

Obliged to own that he had not noticed, he moved his place, the better to examine them. The servants bringing in the tea equipage at that moment, I quitted the group in order to preside, followed by Colonel Palmer, whose interest in the choice appeared to have subsided.

"I am sorry my sister gave you this trouble about the paper," he said; "any one of them would have done."

"Trouble! You know the place must be made very pretty. I want you and Mary to live there always."

"Always!" he repeated, with his sweet, sorrowful smile,

looking down upon me from his height of six feet, which, making conversation difficult, I pointed to a chair.

"You will dine here to-morrow? or I shall have to entertain that horrid man," said I, with a backward movement of my head towards the group behind me.

"I hope so, Colonel Palmer. It will give me pleasure if you accept Lady Granchester's invitation. My friends do not always please her."

Herbert joined the others after saying this, and presently the whole party congregated round or near the tea-table.

Colonel Palmer did not fail me the following day. His company was quite an acquisition, for, in consequence of my husband's remark the previous evening, I made an effort to be tolerant of Sir Mark, who, gratified by my change of manner, would have inflicted his company on me entirely, had it not been for the Colonel. I had reason to regret even this little concession, as it led to my offending him.

Whilst gathering some flowers the next morning, he joined me, and did not hesitate to address me with *banale* compliments, which, I hope, would find few willing auditors among my sex. Having succeeded in breaking off the flower I wanted, I excused myself, and went away up the steps to my morning-room. To my surprise, he followed as far as the *perron*, where I stood still, and twice told him that no visitors were received in that sanctum without special invitation. After dinner I saw Herbert and Sir Mark on the lawn, the latter smoking. It was rather dusk, and very pleasant to sit, as I was doing, in a recess by the window. The little air that was stirring came that way, and brought with it now and then a fresh breath, which I interrupted my reverie to enjoy. They were really going the next day, and I was thinking that Herbert's absence for any certain period might be a relief. That constant going and coming disturbed me, making me restless and unsettled, and prevented me from adopting any regular occupation.

I was wondering why it should be so, when professedly

left my own mistress, when a voice I believed some hundred paces off, spoke close to my ear—"When do you intend visiting your sister?"

"My sister—when—what do you mean?" I asked, startled to find Lord Granchester by my side.

"You have not yet seen her since you returned to England. Will not this be a good opportunity to pay her a visit? Two months or more may elapse before my return. It is not yet quite fixed where we go, but once afloat there is no saying where we may not be roving."

Strange that the idea had not occurred to me. Instead of answering I began thinking.

"Perhaps you consider me to be unfairly interfering with your freedom of action. As you scrupulously adhere to the terms made, it would be unjust on my part to do so; I merely make a suggestion, and would not do that, except that I think the proposition must please you."

Certainly it did, and I said so; secretly thankful that he did not propose my going to the Beeches.

And the next day he went away. Many a happy wife might have sent her husband from home with a little pain mixed with his anticipations of pleasure. She might have placed her hands in his, her head upon his shoulder, whispering—"Go, and enjoy yourself; but do not stay long away, for my heart will weary till you return." I remained still and calm, responding to Herbert's hope that I should like my visit at Brooke Hall with a quiet "Thank you," and turned my cheek to receive his parting salute. There was no false glamour about the present or the future. I was on a level with those for whom buoyant air and God's sunshine, coming alike to the evil and the good, are the best things within their reach.

CHAPTER XXXV.

LIGHTS AND SHADOWS.

THE visit to Brooke Hall terminated, I returned home, but not alone. Julie bore me company. I was not now afraid to listen to the commiseration which had often been unsuccessfully knocking at my heart. She had ceased to utter those hard things which frightened and repelled me. The prophet's fire, rising so often to denunciation of future ill, had died out. Poor Julie! she was changed indeed. Long illness had broken down the strong woman. The mind was bent to an ordinary level, the high spirit subdued. Like Samson of old, she had lost her strength as the penalty of telling her secret. And what was it? Somewhat hard for a daughter to forgive, who in a secondary sense was tasting the bitter fruit of her crime. Had I been trained by that sweet, gentle mother, I must, I will believe that the passionate, undisciplined Una of these pages would not have existed.

Wretched Julie! she might well tell me to stamp out with fanatic energy the first rising of a sinful thought. The victim of an insensate jealousy, she had tried by every art to prevent my mother's marriage; not succeeding, she poisoned all its happiness. A constant resident under her roof, in virtue of a long-professed attachment, she skilfully made use of the position to create and foment a mutual distrust. Admitted to the friendship of both parents, clever and artful besides, she found no difficulty in working upon their guileless natures. Unhappily, a few circumstances in my mother's history furnished materials she knew how to

use for her purpose. My mother was an orphan, brought up by a relative, with whom my father had a slight acquaintance, with no intimates except Julia and a cousin, like herself, an orphan. Had fortune favoured, the cousinly regard might have ripened into love, but it did not. The young man went to India. My father's interest in the gentle orphan deepened; he proposed, was accepted, and loved his young wife dearly, until persuaded that her heart was given to another. Coldness grew between them—my mother pined, my father doubted. Julie was the confidante of both, and turned to such account her knowledge of the affection subsisting between the cousins as to keep the wedded pair apart in heart and sentiment. My father, tender and good; excusing my mother's deceit because she was poor, never reproached or questioned her; and she, distrusting her power to please one so much older and wiser than herself, never complained. Not till just before her death did Julie permit the long-enduring affection to break through the bands that restrained it. My father only knew the value of his partner when he lost her. She died clinging to him, and thanking Julie for the friendship which had comforted her so often, and which she now requested her to continue to her husband and children.

Poor, poor Julie! well might her hair grow grey, well might she shudder against herself, and pass long, long years, since remorse awoke to harrow her soul, in the dark depths of a woe unrelieved by hope. Yet it was our duty, Ellen's and mine, to use a different language. Julie had enough to bear. Of all sorrows, the consciousness of an irreparable wrong done to another is the most bitter that can wring a human heart.

When Julie came with me to Granchester, I had nothing to fear from her hard denunciations or harsh views of retribution. Whenever directed against me, they had been intended for warnings—wrenched from her by the wrestlings of her spirit with itself, rather than prophecies of evil to

me. Now these feelings had, in a measure, subsided. From the bed of sickness she returned to the world a wiser, sobered, but not yet a hopeful Christian. Her heart-strings, for the highest themes, lay inert and powerless; she could not twine them round the glorious promises made to every repentant soul, or grasp the idea of sin freely pardoned. For weary, weary years her conduct to my mother embittered her life. She tried religion, as she understood it, and found no comfort. Looking only at herself and her sin, she saw the latter in such gigantic proportions, that it was impossible to expect aught else but sorrow and mourning for her earthly portion. Notwithstanding our efforts to console her, added to such forgiveness as we might offer, little peace descended into the heart so cleft and torn with contrition. We did not despair. The gentle teachings of Nature often bid us hope. Pressed down by the hard frost, the tender snowdrop cannot force its delicate beauty through the frozen soil; but all in good time the thaw comes, the dews of heaven fall soft and refreshing, and the barren ground speedily dons a mantle of variegated loveliness. So might it be with this woe-weary daughter of Eve; the clouds might unexpectedly part, and admit the light she needed.

Beside Alice's dying pillow I had learnt a truth outreaching every fault, failing, shortcoming, or sin of humanity —there is no limit to Divine mercy but from ourselves. The call "Come unto Me," is addressed to all that feel themselves "heavy-laden." Julie laboured under sorrow, and was oppressed by it. Surely she was one intended to hear and obey the unrestricted invitation. In the hope that the dear friends about me might assist in deepening the softer feelings which Joshua and Ellen had stirred, I brought her to Granchester. The Stanleys were wise and good; Mrs. Ewing, earnest and intellectual; Colonel Palmer, a manly, out-spoken Christian, ever ready to bear a noble testimony to the truths he believed. Here would

be another wholesome atmosphere for her new-born convictions to breathe; besides, she had a genuine affection for me, and regarded this visit as the seal of my forgiveness.

The days passed pleasantly. At my request, Colonel Palmer gave a good deal of time and attention to Julie. Unweariedly he would, day after day, combat her despairing theology, until by degrees he forced upon her a consoling belief in the divine, unfathomable goodness of Him who "can love us though He read us true." A listener, too, I was a gainer also. My higher faculties became more and more developed, for, being an outsider, I could appropriate instruction without arguing my right to apply it to myself. Attacking Julie's stronghold, he emphatically repudiated the teaching of those who would convert earth into a wilderness. "If harmless enjoyment comes in your way, take it, cherish it," he would say to her; "never think that you are to put it from you with a thankless hand. He who gave wishes you to possess. If He taketh pleasure in the prosperity of His servants, He cannot be satisfied with those who regard His gifts without gratitude, or who refuse to be forgiven when He is willing to pardon." There was no harshness in Colonel Palmer, not even when called upon to rebuke, but a winning courtesy, running far deeper than the soft blandishments of external refinement. The tenderest, clinging, most confiding love would have found all it wanted in a character like his. Whether misfortune assailed, or prosperity smiled, he would bear the test of either, for both must journey in the company of principle. Those who liked him, or cared to stand well with him, were unconsciously drawn into a higher atmosphere, and forced, in a measure, to adopt his standard. Julie became happier; her ascetic tendencies gradually melted away. The drives, walks, and occupations at Granchester afforded her interest. The Vicarage party was much with us. Mrs. Ewing was at this time a good deal at Holly Bush, and, when there, added

her own wider range to the Vicar's benevolent plans for the village and neighbourhood.

Attracted at first by her originality, Julie grew to like and honour her; the liking increased, and ended by making her a convert to new opinions and duties. The improved health and sounder state of mind Julie now enjoyed, created a desire to employ her reviving energies in some way of usefulness. There are some minds which can only be kept healthy by occupation. Julie's was one, and through the energy of Mrs. Ewing it was provided. Near that lady, no drone could sleep peacefully in the hive. If one sphere of labour did not attract, she found another. She waged an incessant war with a purposeless life, and by expostulation or perseverance, enlisted the services of some, who, but for her, would have suffered their days to slip away without a single record worth preserving: the class who, bound by no domestic ties to natural duties, might waste their intelligence and sympathies on lap-dogs and parrots, did no superior spirit point out a better way. Mrs. Ewing had persuaded Julie to interest herself in emigration, and to take part in preparing the young women who were about to leave the country. The next day they were both going away from Granchester to begin their work in London, the great centre of philanthropical institutions.

The last evening of Julie's visit we were a cheerful party within doors, though it was dreary enough without. It was the fifth of November, a day long consecrated to the fun of squibs and crackers by the village urchins, who delighted to celebrate the escape from a national calamity by frightening horses and destroying property, tearing away loose shutters and unguarded fences to convert into food for bonfires. A drizzling rain had been falling the whole day, and now pattered against the windows, effectually quenching the rural ardour, though it only enhanced the comfort and warmth proceeding from a bright fire glowing upon more than one merry face and a well-lighted room. Besides

Julie, my guests were Lionel and Agnes Osborne and Mary Rivers staying in the house, with the quartette from the Vicarage and Holly Bush to dinner.

The table covered with maps and papers, Julie Kenyon's plans, or rather those of the Society she had joined, had been well discussed, and now yielded in interest to the more animated conversation Lionel was carrying on with the young ladies. We drew more round the fire, and the servants were bringing in the tea, when suddenly, as an apparition from another world, my husband entered and stood in the midst of us before any one perceived him. The merriment ceased at once. "Herbert!" "Lord Granchester!" were the spontaneous exclamations, some of us going forward to give him a welcome. If it was not very warm, it was at least all politeness required. By the compact which now bound us together, I had no reason to mind his finding me as she did, surrounded by friends and visibly enjoying their society. What I did mind, was the effect of his unexpected appearance upon myself. It was a chill, not a joy—oppression, not gladness—a sort of suffocation from contending emotions. Where, oh! where was I going, when the presence which ought to be dear, brought discomfort and *gêne?* Was I really drifting away from him, from every chance of peace, from an honouring love of home, from all those hallowed ties and thoughts which constitute the best glory of womanhood? I saw my danger, and felt powerless to avert it. If he looked calmly on, careless of me; if strangers came between us, taking my first thoughts, associating themselves with the pleasantest, the only avocations I had that were not absolutely colourless and insipid,—what would become of me? I must glide into a current I could not stem, and whither would it bear me? There was a round of duty—yet very little of that—wrestlings against myself, against hard thoughts of God, who, having so much to bestow, gave me so little. Sometimes I went so far as to wish I had never returned.

With the feeling of performing a duty, I soon followed Herbert into his study. By this time the fire was burning brightly, and sent a warm glow over the rich crimson hangings. On my entrance he was turning over a pile of letters and selecting some for perusal.

"Are you quite well; have you enjoyed yourself?" I asked.

"Quite well, thank you; and you—how long did you remain with your sister?"

"About a month, and brought Julie away with me. She has been slowly recovering from a long illness." I then proceeded to detail her present projects, and to remark upon the great improvement her character had undergone, until arrested by obvious signs of his taking no interest in the story. I then changed the subject. "Have you ordered dinner? Shall I sit with you while you eat it?"

To these questions, not very eagerly put, I received polite but cold answers. My company was declined, on the ground that I had better not absent myself from my visitors. Conscious that he was displeased, though I knew not the reason, and too proud to press my society after it had been refused, I returned to the drawing-room, where my husband's appearance and sudden return were still under discussion. One thought him tired, and supposed he had come from Cowes that day; another bronzed, and that he had been in southern latitudes. I knew nothing of his movements; such inquiries had not entered into our short conversation, so that when questioned I was obliged to increase my inward fretful chafings by a mortifying confession of ignorance.

From that day forward a decided change was observable in Herbert; he was more at home and kept less company. In the day-time he was often engaged with the bailiff, and sometimes was absent until dinner. Though frequently taciturn, or even moody, until the young ladies forced him into conversation, he generally spent the evening with us.

They were not lively when dependent on him, as Agnes Osborne and Mary Rivers must often have felt, when the others, having taken their departure, they remained my guests a little longer. I could but suppose that the careless expenditure reported of him was yielding its fruit of care and anxiety.

My old trial, the visit to the Beeches, was to come off at Christmas; there was no escaping it. Herbert had stated his intention to accompany me. Before that took place, Mr. Norris and Lady Emily came to spend a few days at Granchester. They offered themselves, and were gladly welcomed by us both. Had his wife been less charming in herself, Mr. Norris, in the character of a Benedict, would have interested me. He had not lost his cynicism, but it assumed an impeachable form, being chiefly directed against Lady Emily, and served only as a flimsy veil to cover with playful satire his affection and esteem. If he detailed a weakness, it was one that honoured her; if he related a mistake, it never told against her. There was, besides, a loving glance in his eye when turned towards her, which said plainly enough that the fetters he affected to regret were very dear. I did not envy Lady Emily because her wishes met with her husband's attention—mine would have done the same on most points, had I chosen to express them; but because she had, what I might never expect, that heart union from whence flow the cheering words of a perfect trust. I think Herbert was alive to the harmony of his cousin's *ménage* as well as myself, though he said little about it. During the short visit, he and Lady Emily were much together, and often engaged in earnest conversation. The time had gone by when such intimacy could provoke my jealousy. On the contrary, it now gave me satisfaction, for, knowing her to be my friend no less than his, I was no more afraid of her influence.

"Are you satisfied with yourself?—are you really contented with the life you lead?" I heard her ask him one

morning, when, charged with a message from Mr. Norris, I unexpectedly came upon them as they were talking.

"No; I hate it!" thundered Herbert, expressing himself with vehemence; "but it is too late to begin with A B C again. The end will come and then——" He gave an impatient shrug of the shoulders.

"Lady Granchester——" began Lady Emily.

"Don't talk to me any more of Lady Granchester," he interrupted in a cross tone, and looked away.

"Talk of the sun, and you see its beams. Here she is," replied Lady Emily, then first perceiving me.

The door being ajar and the room large, I had advanced well into the middle without being observed. Neither Herbert nor I joined in her merriment as she laughingly uttered her ready compliment, nor, I am bound to admit, did he appear disturbed at my presence.

"Mr. Norris wishes for his little sprite in the library," said I, delivering my message verbatim; and, contrary to Lady Emily's wish, I withdrew with her, thereby sparing Herbert, as I imagined, an awkward *tête-à-tête*.

"If you could but show your husband some affection, you would do him good and be happier yourself," said she to me at the close of her visit.

"That would never do," was my reply; "it would only send him farther away from me."

Lady Emily, unconvinced, shook her little head, and returned me the monosyllable—"Try."

"Did he ever express any desire for it?" said I.

"He is very reserved with me when I speak of you, but by the way he watches and listens when you are battling with Laurence or conversing with Colonel Palmer, I am sure there is no real indifference on his side—there is admiration, if not something more."

I could not be persuaded. "I tried it once, and was unsuccessful." My answer was disingenuous, and I knew it. The passionate attachment of former days was of too

exacting a character to fall within her meaning—the wise, reasonable, patient love which she would have me exercise, being altogether different.

"You and Herbert must come to Holmewood when you leave the Beeches," said Lady Emily, as we both stood with her at the hall door while the last parcel was being put into the carriage.

"Una may, perhaps—I shall be going to town," answered Herbert.

Some demonstration of the impatience I felt escaped me, and the hot blood mounted to my face and then flowed as swiftly back, leaving me conscious of a dull, aching pain. The same life was again to be repeated which I had found so difficult to get through during the past summer and autumn. A recklessness, ending in a desire to vex my husband at any cost to myself, took possession of me, The irritation I was desirous to vent was only kept back for want of opportunity, as he left me before the carriage had fairly driven off. Great was my surprise, when, on reaching my comfortable room, whose privacy was rarely invaded, I found him there, obviously waiting for me. With a cloudy brow I took my seat, so far reasonable as mentally to perceive that in exercising his right to go away when he pleased, he in no way violated the terms on which I had consented to return home.

"Do you wish to go to town when we leave the Beeches?" he asked, sitting down beside me and playing with some object lying on the table.

"No; that is, not unless you wish, if you would rather——" My sentences were as confused as my ideas. I came in anger, and found myself melting into tenderness—he looked so listless and careworn. What but pride, and pride voluntarily strengthened, kept me from evincing the solicitude which might have touched him then?

After waiting vainly for me to explain myself better, he spoke himself, and in a contemptuous tone, though against

whom directed, was not apparent. "We are leading a false life, false in every way—false to ourselves, false to society. It has gone on so long that a little more of it does not matter. Sooner or later comes the end, and then——" here he gave that careless shrug I so much disliked. "What I want now is to ascertain if you desire to go to town in the spring. That is due to you. You may wish to renew some of your former connections. Having handsomely given up your income, it is but fair for you to have a voice in spending it. I cannot offer an establishment befitting your father's daughter, but you shall have rooms in any hotel you may choose. If we must go to the ground at last, why should you not take all the enjoyment you can beforehand?"

The recklessness lurking in his concluding words pained me more than the kindness—I should rather say, the consideration—of the first pleased The latter he had promised; to do him justice he had kept his word according to his own interpretation of it. He endeavoured to be fair and just, not interfering more with me than he expected me to do with him.

"I do not care to go to town," I answered, longing to express the hope that, by retrenchment and economy, we might overcome the difficulties to which he alluded. My decision was so evidently a relief that I forgot everything else. Whilst I bowed my head to conceal the pang his ready acquiescence in my absence caused me, he hurriedly stated his intention to take care that his mother brought no vexing subjects under discussion during our stay at the Beeches, and went away.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE FÊTE.

DAYS glided into weeks and weeks into months. Spring came and donned its joyous garb. The tender leaves unfolded, the pointed buds burst from their silken tissues, and in due time tree and flower progressed into their natural beauty.

For nearly sixteen months after I lost Percy, Herbert allowed me to decline all general visiting. He rarely spoke of him—I never; yet I believe his memory was still fondly cherished by us both. Our grief was too sacred to share with others, and between ourselves ran too broad a line of separation for one to seek sympathy of the other. So much self-reproach was mingled with my sorrow, that I could only bear to indulge it alone. If Herbert, taking the same view, was silent to spare me, he was generous, and carried out, more strictly than I desired, his recommendation to avoid the chances of recrimination and dispute, by obliteration of the past.

I had been to the Beeches, I had been to Holmewood, and these visits, with the exception of the one paid to my sister in the autumn, comprised all my absences from Granchester since my return to England, about a twelvemonth before. My seclusion was now to be interrupted. A rural fête was shortly to be given in our neighbourhood in honour of Sir John Tredegar, who, with his newly-married wife, was coming to be our guest for the occasion.

"You must go, Una," said Herbert, alluding to the entertainment in prospect; "I am tired of making excuses

for you, and to decline without will be prejudicial to yourself."

I glanced at my black dress, still deeply craped.

"Must we not accept the affliction? I have heard you express sentiments placing resignation under trial among the first qualities of a Christian. I believe you aspire to be one."

"I do, but——" The remark from Herbert was novel, and I was glad of the opening, hoping it might lead further than surface talk. Whilst hesitating how best to explain myself, he cut short the subject, saying, "People find arguments in favour of their own cause so readily, it is scarcely worth while to weigh them. I hope you will go. Tredegar is an old friend, and will be hurt if you do not."

I liked Sir John Tredegar, but I should have preferred having the request urged in another form. I gave my consent, and a few days after found that the concession was the preliminary to another demand.

Sir John and Lady Tredegar, Captain and Mrs. Kingstone were our guests. To please my husband I had lightened my sable garments a little, and perhaps, seeing that he was more observant to please myself, I gave more attention to the toilet. I could not refuse to perceive that Lord Granchester was changed. If listless, languid, often wearied-looking in the midst of company of his own choosing, he was less so when I was near. My presence seemed to supply a motive for watching and listening, which at other times was generally absent. Having no reason to interpret the newly-awakened interest as telling in my favour, I was somewhat surprised when, bending over a flower-bed in which I was particularly interested, near one of his windows, he joined me, saying—

"Our cruise this summer will be a short one. I am going to the Highlands in August for some grouse-shooting, and hope you will accompany me."

Snap! went the beautiful plant I had watched so sedulously, broken by the hasty movement of my hand at this

unexpected announcement. By slowly picking up the severed head, I so far recovered myself as to be ready to express a sober pleasure in complying with his wishes, when my secret joy was dashed to the ground.

"Wentworth has rented a snug little place in the north, and is so desirous of receiving you that he means to secure one of his lady relatives to preside, and will send you a special invitation."

"I will never accept it! No one shall compel me to go. He is too absolutely odious," was my hasty reply.

The colour mounted to Herbert's cheek as quickly as it had done to mine. He was the first to recover, and put the natural question—"What has my friend done to incur your displeasure?"

What had he done? I really had nothing to allege against him in extenuation of the strong dislike exhibited. Attentions officious, because unwelcome, and a bold habit of staring, when stated as grievances would make me simply ridiculous.

"Speak out," said Herbert, preventing my escape by holding me fast by the hand. "If you give a rational explanation of this antipathy, I side with you; if not, you must not be surprised at my putting it down to prejudice."

My situation was absurd, I had testified indignation which it was out of my power to defend, and was vexed with all parties—myself, Herbert, and Sir Mark. When again urged to speak, I muttered something about his rude habit of staring, which was received, as I almost expected, with a laugh.

"He thinks you very handsome," said Herbert, relaxing his hold. "If that is a great offence, I believe you must reckon others besides him among the offenders. You must try and bear the misfortune of being admired. He comes to-morrow, principally to pay a compliment to the Tredegars. Remember, he is one of my friends. I ask for him the same courtesy I extend to yours."

After this I could say no more of my dislike to Sir Mark.

Though undiminished in reality, I was too wary to make a display of it, and received him the following day with unimpeachable politeness. Arriving just before dinner, there was only time for him to be shown straight to his room. Our meeting took place in presence of the assembled guests a few seconds before the announcement of dinner. I could afford to be amiable; Sir John Tredegar, being the senior baronet, would take me out, and, by the arrangements of the table, Sir Mark's seat was at the other end.

Except on the one occasion referring to my going to town in the last spring, Herbert had never alluded to the state of his affairs, but I had heard enough at Holmewood, and also had gathered sufficient from other sources, to fear that they were in great disorder—hopelessly so, for all sources of aid were, as far as I knew, exhausted. Neither he nor I had any further inheritance to expect. My dear father's forethought had secured me ample competency. Would Herbert consent to break up his establishment, leave his friends, and pass a few years in retirement, he might recover himself—at least I thought so. But that I knew he would be unwilling to do, nor was I forward to propose it. Accustomed to lavish expenditure, and, as I feared, to accept debt as a normal condition, I could not offer, nor his mind supply, a motive strong enough to uproot the habits of his life. "About what is the annual expense of a yacht like Lord Granchester's?" had been my question one day to Mr. Norris. "Between £1,000 and £1,500 a year," was the answer. Nearly half my income! It was plain that the yacht was one of the expensive pleasures to be abandoned, when, to use Herbert's own careless expression," the end came."

As some of these reflections flitted across my mind during a pause in the conversation at the late breakfast the day before the fête, my eye rested on a weight of old-fashioned plate under which the sideboard groaned, sparkling with even modern brilliancy, thanks to the careful affection of

the old servant who guarded it. All at once its value struck me, and I began to ponder whether it would not be less degrading to sell it than to remain—the words used by Mr. Slater before my ill-assorted wedlock flashed across my mind —"crippled with debt." To my ideas, it would be better to part with that and everything else available; but here another thought came in. As Herbert once told me when I ventured a hint about economy, I was "a merchant's daughter, inclined to balance a debtor-and-creditor account."

My own name loudly spoken disturbed these calculations.

"Anything you like; I am Lady Granchester's devoted servant for the day."

The point under discussion was the number of carriages required for the morrow, and the speaker was Sir Mark. My wishes not coinciding with his, I determined to make arrangements for myself. The breakfast over and the company despersed, I sought my own sanctum and wrote the following note :—

"DEAR COLONEL,

"I charge it on your friendliness to go to the fête to-morrow, and protect me from that odious Sir Mark, who claims to be my 'devoted.' We start at three o'clock. Come in time.

"Yours gratefully,

"UNA GRANCHESTER."

This was my favourite signature whenever I had occasion to write to him. Never did I forget how much I owed to his friendly care, his kind counsels, and winning principles during the course of our acquaintance. The note written, I stepped out on the balcony to find a messenger. Not one of the gardeners was visible, only Sir Mark, coming out of Herbert's room by the window near the steps. Perceiving me he began to mount, when I waved him back, saying that I received all visitors downstairs in the drawing-room.

"I am no visitor, only a poor straw, attracted by an all-powerful magnet," and setting at naught my prohibition, he stood beside me.

My eye still wandered around in search of some one. By

accident or design he laid his hand on mine as it rested on the railing, and in quickly removing my own, the letter dropped to the ground. Of course he rushed down to pick it up, and equally of course he read the address. Having followed, I received it from him, and espying a lad of one of the gardener's just then turning the corner, near one of the windows of Lord Granchester's room, I went after him and called him several times before he heard me. Setting down some flower-pots he was carrying, he came towards me.

"Take this note to Holly Bush, and give it to the Colonel himself, into his own hands," I repeated.

"I will save you the trouble as I am going that way; give it to me," and Herbert's hand was stretched out over my shoulder. Both he and Sir Mark had approached me unperceived whilst I was waiting for the lad. The boy hesitated and looked at me. Perhaps my own decision would not have been so unembarrassed had I not caught sight of Sir Mark's expression. There was no reason to fear my husband's displeasure, it being his boast to leave me freedom of action, provided I did not wound any of those susceptible feelers we call *les convenances*. In this instance I did not imagine myself guilty. The satisfied smile spreading over Sir Mark's face was somewhat checked when, taking the note from the lad, I immediately offered it to Herbert, who put it into his pocket, and spoke of something else. Did Sir Mark believe that he meant to convey it to its destination? He looked puzzled. He knew we were not what the world calls an attached couple, but of the terms on which we really stood to each other he was ignorant. Wishing for the Baronet's benefit to show that a certain confidence existed between Lord Granchester and myself, and secure of external respect in the presence of others, I called Herbert's attention to the arrangement of some of the flower-beds, which had been changed by my orders, sheltering myself the while from the sun then streaming down, by clasping my hands above my head. He first

looked, then told me to go indoors out of the heat, at the same time throwing his white silk *foulard* over me—a recommendation I gladly followed. Sir Mark was foiled. The little incident, which but for my husband's high breeding and my self-possession might have degenerated into a scene, had passed off quietly.

"I would give nine-tenths of his polished refinement for one grain of genuine affection, whatever the consequences," was my bitter comment when, in the privacy of my room, I sat down and bent my face over my supporting hands. Feeling the handkerchief I had forgotten to remove taken away, I looked up. Herbert stood near me, holding the letter so as to leave no doubt of his meaning.

"I have tried to maintain a just course with regard to you. If I appear to depart from it, you must blame society rather than me. In asking your permission to open this, I am aware that I trench upon our compact. You have faithfully performed your part. If you refuse my request on this occasion, I shall submit. Both of us know too well the value of home peace to be willing lightly to violate it. Had we earlier learnt the lesson, the present might be different from what it now is." If my ears were true, not a sigh exactly, but certainly something approaching it, escaped him. "Do you consent to my reading this note?"

"Gladly."

Surprise at the shortness of my missive was the first impression to my mind as I watched him peruse it, and then annoyance.

"My part in the arrangements of to-morrow is, I see, quite ignored. That was not in the bond, was it?" he asked, with an ironical smile. "Our opinions as to what is suitable and proper do not accord. In a matter of this kind I should have imagined that I, not Colonel Palmer, was the person to be addressed. We shall be obliged to come to definitions of what is expected from each other."

"You seem to like Sir Mark so much, and are very strong in your friendships," was the excuse I offered.

"True; I believe I have that good quality, if I have no other." He said these last words as he disappeared by the window, taking the letter with him.

As Colonel Palmer's name was not again mentioned, and we did not meet that day, I was not a little surprised to see him, at the appointed time for starting, issue from the belt of trees and cross the lawn with a coat upon his arm, evidently prepared for the drive, though, when last I saw him, he had no intention of going to the fête.

Quickly descending the steps, I met him with the exclamation, "I am so glad you are going!"

"Of course I am; did you not write and ask me?"

When necessary I could both hold my tongue and keep a secret. I did so now, guessing with no small degree of satisfaction through what channel my letter had reached him. The carriages were near the door, and our guests were in the hall, waiting to be placed. I did not then see Sir Mark.

"Here, Palmer, you are to have the honour of the ancient barouche. I hope it will not come to an inglorious dismemberment on the way. Come, Una, take your place by Lady Tredegar. With these words, Herbert assisted me into the carriage, then made way for Colonel Palmer, and told the coachman to drive off—Sir John, our fourth, being already seated.

How it fared with Sir Mark and the others I did not inquire. It was sufficient for me that Herbert had attended to my wishes. From finding him at my side when we reached our destination, and in his usual good-humour, I may conclude that my husband had managed Sir Mark as courteously as he did every one else, and that he was unconscious of having been deliberately thwarted.

This was my first appearance in society since our bereavement; let me speak out more bravely—since I

excluded myself from it, more than three years before. To that circumstance and to Lord Granchester's promise of consideration, I was indebted to his unusual attentions. He scarcely left me at all. On his arm I leant whenever I walked, and he stood beside me whenever I rested. To every former acquaintance whom I met that day, our reconciliation must have appeared complete.

Entertainments of this kind deserve no special description. Where wealth employs every device that can amuse, and society, dressed in its best, accepts with radiant smiles, such things must go off well. In the arena where grace and fashion congregate, there is really very little to record. The actors in these scenes supply all the interest, and that being confined to the day and hour, does not enter into the history of the inner life, which it is my present object to relate. They change, but this, in some of its windings, abides the same for all.

Doubtless many there assembled enjoyed themselves, and found something to relate or think of on their return home. To my own infinite surprise I was one of the number, though I should have found it difficult to say why.

Having some distance to go, our set was among the earliest to leave. Sir John having been coaxed away from the barouche to a *tête-à-tête* drive with Captain Kingstone, I perceived Sir Mark preparing to take his place. Casting his coat into the corner opposite me, he was about to take that seat for himself, when Herbert laid hold of his arm—"Out of that, my dear fellow; I am going there, and Mrs. Kingstone is asking for you." Restoring his coat, Herbert put Sir Mark gently on one side and got in himself, the other places being already occupied.

What a pleasant drive home that was! and yet I can recollect so little about it, only that I talked incessantly, surprising as well as amusing my companions by unwonted animation. One incident I do remember. Herbert dropped his glove—a fresh delicate lavender, an honest Jouvin—and

would not stop the carriage to have it recovered, alleging as a reason that he could not allow his carelessness to inconvenience his friends.

"You would stop and pick it up, I suppose," said he, in answer to my expostulations.

"Certainly."

"Naturally. You are a merchant's daughter, cognisant of relative value;" then, remarking my look of vexation, he laid his hand on mine, saying, in a kindly tone, "No disparagement, Una; I wish I had been a merchant's son."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE DISASTER.

THE yachters left Cowes in the beginning of June, and before the end of the month my sister and her family came to Granchester to spend some weeks with me. I had heard once from Herbert. The *Ariel* was then near Newfoundland, and might perhaps go farther north. That was in the beginning of July. We were now approaching the end. Joshua Pinnoch, who had been going to and fro, either to town or to Brooke Hall, was with us for the last time, intending to start homewards with his wife and children on the morrow. Johnnie, now somewhat grown, but little changed, had been with us about ten days, his holidays having only then commenced. No sooner did he make his appearance than the old hall re-echoed with noise, to the visible disturbance of the antlered heads, many of whose points became injured by some unknown mysterious agency. I may say the whole house underwent a change, for there was no part where he was not heard or seen. From the butler's pantry to the gardener's greenhouses, not omitting his mother's boudoir or mine, he found everywhere employment for his energies. I could but rejoice that my husband was away, for this volatile boy, with his versatile tastes, would have been a severe infliction upon him. Whatever was talked of, he must give his opinion—whatever was done, he must have a hand in it.

Mrs. Jenkins, the ex-housekeeper of Granchester, having been ill, I not only frequently visited her, but often accompanied my visits with small stores of consolation, in the

form of arrowroot, tea, sugar, and biscuits. Hearing me express an intention of going to see her that last afternoon in July, he was clamorous to go with me I knew it would be a kindness to take him out of the way of the rest. They were to leave on the morrow, and this restless child, always claiming attention, hindered rather than aided the preparations for departure.

"O Aunt Una! let us go together, and let me carry the basket. Don't send it."

Nothing else seemed so great a pleasure to him at that moment, and I was weak enough to comply. How could I foresee that his volatility, upsetting all ordinary calculation, would turn every trifle into mischief. Even now I must laugh at the constant repression necessary in every undertaking with Johnnie.

"Don't swing the basket—you will tumble some of the parcels out, or tear the paper. Don't walk so fast—you heat yourself too much. Don't run away from me—I thought you came to be my companion."

These and similar sentences were continually on my lips as we pursued our walk along the cool side of the river, which would presently lead us out of the park to Mrs. Jenkins' cottage. Though one moment by my side, the next he was several yards ahead, or loitering behind.

A sudden and sharp exclamation made me look round. There was Johnnie's basket upside down on the grass, and himself bending over the shelving bank, endeavouring to pick up some of the parcels which, unhappily, had lodged in one of the small hollows. How he managed to deposit them there it was useless to inquire; he was an acknowledged adept in every form of mischief, and equally quick to repair it.

"Come away, Johnnie, never mind the parcels. Come away, directly!" screamed I, in terror; for although the river was rather shallow just there, it had a strong current, and would have carried him away like a straw had he fallen

within its action. To make matters worse, the heavy rains of some previous days had increased its volume and power to more than their accustomed force.

"That is enough, let the rest go," I exclaimed, hastening to the spot, with the intention of dragging him away. He had rescued one parcel, and after throwing it triumphantly on the grass towards me, renewed his efforts to reach the others. Obedience was not in his character, nor yet a quiet submission to expediency. Before I could approach near enought to enforce my orders by taking hold of him, he over-balanced himself, as I feared he would, and rolled headlong down the bank into the water. Being not far from the edge at first, and not entirely covered, with a little presence of mind he might have got out again with no worse punishment than a good wetting; but in his struggles to rise, he went further in, and terrified me lest he should get into the current. No one was near, nor was there much chance of attracting the attention of any one, that part of the park being solitary, and we some distance from the house. Having only myself to depend upon, and no time for consideration, I did the best I could. I spoke slowly and calmly, yet my hands trembled so much it was difficult to carry out my intentions. The principal thing was to prevent a movement backwards.

"Keep quite still for a moment, Johnnie," said I, cheerfully, hoping to make him patient. "Look straight at me, and try and catch the scarf I am going to throw towards you. Don't pull hard, but raise yourself gently, and roll this way."

So saying, I loosened a scarf from my shoulders, and after a few failures succeeded in throwing it within his reach. He caught it eagerly. "Gently, gently," was all I could say, when my own feet played me false. Owing to his quick, frightened clutch, and the slippery nature of the soil, I lost my balance and went tumbling down after him, but not into the same place where he had fallen. I fell

lower down, where the current, taking a slanting direction, made a kind of elbow towards the bank. A sensation of cold, a hard struggling to regain my feet before completely carried away, I remember perfectly well, and then seeing Johnnie dance along the bank, shouting wildly—"The tree! the tree! catch at the tree, Aunt Una! catch at the tree!"

That side was fringed with alders and other shrubs, affording no prospect of any substantial aid; but Johnnie's sharp eyes had quickly spied out the branch of an old tree which projected over the water—a thick-leafed branch—and to this he was calling my attention. I see him now, the wiry, active fellow, dripping from head to foot, thrusting his matted, tangled hair from his brow with one hand, and indicating what he fancied might be a safety-point with the other, calling out at the top of his treble voice—rendered more than usually shrill by fear and anxiety—"The tree! the tree! Hook your arm round the tree!"

I tried, but could not reach it. He stamped his feet with vexation at my failure, and continued shouting, "Only another inch!—O, Aunt Una, only another inch!"

I was moving onwards with no power to resist, but, urged by his screams, I still stretched out my hands and grasped something, I could not see what, and there was a gurgling noise in my ears. Johnnie's voice became fainter and fainter, and then all was silent. I felt sure he had gone for help—that he would go at his topmost speed—yet the time appeared long. The water seemed to roar louder and louder, and I feared every minute I might let go, for my hands ached with their tight clutch of the hard, knotty bark. I was not far from the place where Johnnie fell, but I was just within the current, and knew that if I lost my hold I must be carried away, as I had not strength to move against it. Even then I swayed to and fro, only kept safe by the branch. I was so afraid of becoming unconscious and relaxing my grasp, that I tried to count, in order to

keep my energies awake, but it was no use: before I reached twenty I was out, and had to begin again.

"Thank Heaven! you are safe—let go, my darling, my beloved one; nothing shall hurt you now!" A strong arm lifted me as the voice came, a gentle hand endeavoured to unloose my nervous clasp of the tree, and I was soon borne in safety to the bank.

O Johnnie! Johnnie! of all the mischief you have done in your busy, thoughtless life, none ever caused such bitter sorrow, such poignant regret as this, and all might have been avoided by one act of obedience!

My friend Colonel Palmer, whom I had invested with the highest qualities which could adorn manhood, round whom my woman's worship clung as a being to be venerated for goodness and nobility of mind, thrown off his guard by my danger, and distressed at my apparent insensibility—for I could not speak, and had closed my eyes for rest—uttered aloud the breathings of his heart, which, but for this supreme moment of anxiety, would never have stained his lips. They fell on my ear with a sweetness never heard before. They were not words of mere affection, but of such deep tenderness, such loving care and eager solicitude, that, unwillingly—to my confusion and dismay—my heart danced for joy. It drank in the clear and novel sounds with a kind of mad enjoyment, feeling that, might I but listen and echo back a portion of that deep attachment, a light and brightness, sorely needed and never yet obtained, would pass into my life. And yet—I judge myself truly—dear as were these accents to one so athirst for the gentle tones which declared my existence precious to another, I was sorry, deeply sorry that this had happened. My idol was tarnished—the golden image, after all, was mixed with clay. Hitherto he had been a dear friend, to whom I delighted to render both gratitude and affection. His instructions and reflections, like sunbeams on the neglected gem, had elicited the best parts of my disposition. Must

I not grieve that aught that could sully should approach the pedestal on which he stood; and yet—and yet—soft and healing as the genial dew, came the conviction that I had a place in his noble heart.

He had carried me to a bench near, and was supporting my head upon his chest.

"Thank you, Colonel Palmer, I will relieve you from attendance on my wife. Give her to me."

The bench being a common, rustic one, without a back, Lord Granchester had approached from behind, and, sitting down beside me, drew me away from Colonel Palmer. His face was of an ashy pallor, and his hands trembled as he took hold of me.

"What is the meaning of all this? Can you not speak, Una? Johnnie says you fell into the water in helping him out."

Distressed at what I had heard, frightened also by Herbert's unexpected presence at that unlucky moment, and fearing, besides, that a quarrel might arise between the two, I exerted myself to relate, as well as I could, what had happened, that is, Johnnie's fall and mine.

"I met the boy," said Herbert, "wet and dirty, scampering towards the house, shouting something about Lady Granchester and the water. Had I rightly understood the story, he should not have forgotten his share in it."

Careful and gentlemanlike as my husband's language habitually was, I was not a little surprised at the unmeasured abuse which now fell upon poor Johnnie, and could not help speaking a word in his favour.

"The incarnation of mischief!—I should like to give him as sound a thrashing as could be given, short of breaking his bones," replied Herbert, vehemently. Then, in a milder tone, added—"I must get you home directly. You must try and walk; movement is the best thing for you—it may prevent a chill."

"You had better allow me to carry her to the house;

I am strong enough to do it, and should convey her more quickly that she can walk," said Colonel Palmer, speaking for the first time since Herbert's approach. "The longer Lady Granchester remains in her clothes the greater the risk to her health." I observed that he spoke timidly, and avoided my husband's eye.

"Thank you, that is my care," answered Herbert, shortly and frigidly.

"I am already wet, and consequently——" Colonel Palmer stopped, intimidated, I believe, by the contemptuous expression on Herbert's face. Yet his proposition was considerate; he was not only a stronger man, but while he, like myself, was covered with mud and water, Herbert's dress was faultless, except where soiled by coming in contact with me.

"Gather up all your strength, Una," said Herbert; "there is no help for it, you must walk."

With his assistance I endeavoured to stand, tottered a little at first, but he held me fast. We moved homewards; Colonel Palmer, of whom he took no notice, following sorrowfully—his eyes cast down, and his usually erect figure shrunken and bowed. My husband's face was white and stern, and his carriage haughtily upright, like one in whom some strong power was working. My sympathy, the softer feeling which throbs with pain at the suffering of another, was for Colonel Palmer; he looked so stricken and remorseful. That Herbert had overheard some portion of the involuntary revelation just made, was apparent. In my mind arose the question—Had he a right to be angry? Was he not himself the cause of this misfortune?—I could call it by no other name. By placing me in circumstances of such trying isolation, when I must either stand alone or seek the aid of friendship, was he not mainly the author of the wrong he now resented? My sense of justice cried out against him as responsible for the great sorrow I witnessed, and which cut me to the heart. I had not gone from him,

but he had left me to myself, and, by withholding the kind confidences which draw husband and wife together, had permitted a stranger to come between us. How he might regard my part in the drama just played was of no consequence to me at that moment. I was too absorbed in grieving over Colonel Palmer's grief to give it a thought. I so valued that friendship—it had upheld me when I had no strength of my own; it had made me wiser, better, happier; it had been to me refreshing as the shadow of the stately oak, when the fierce heat beats down on the unsheltered head.

I was not altogether what might be termed weak. I had strong feelings, and sometimes good sense. I could occasionally stand alone, but where is the woman whose faint heart never needs support, whose weakness does not sometimes ask another's strength to defend it? Are there not moments when, brave it as we will, we want the help, the counsel, or the countenance of man? In any doubt or difficulty, whether in the details of my life, or in the higher fields of thought and reasoning, I had long been in the habit of consulting him, convinced that if I could adopt his opinions I must necessarily be right. Sorrow, too, would melt away under his kindly smile. Often my heaviness of spirit was lightened after some of those conversations, which, whatever they did for him, strengthened me. And what was the result of my thoughtless enjoyment of these advantages? The more I reflected, the more angry I was with my husband. With bitter self-reproach I also lamented my selfishness—the blind pursuit of my own ease and gain, which had helped on this miserable state of things. The hot tears fell fast, not for myself, nor for Herbert's probable displeasure—of that I was reckless—but for Colonel Palmer's degradation, and the keen sense he had of it. Well I knew that in the ordinary wear of life the words addressed to me under the excitement of my danger and rescue, would never have passed his lips. He was the last man to

stain his honour by such language to the wedded wife of another.

Alas! for my poor heart, so long bruised and aching, even then mixed with my deep and sincere regret, was a tremulous, irrepressible joy, that I, the unloved Una, had found a spot in the wide world where I was loved and cherished. I was ashamed of myself, yet the feeling was there; I knew it to be a brand of disgrace, yet I could not pluck it away. "O Herbert! Herbert!" my heart cried out in its pain, "why could you not love me a little, when I needed affection so much?"

As we walked on, my husband's silence and pointed way of ignoring Colonel Palmer's presence by looking straight before him, only made me long the more to give some token of kindness as he continued silent by my side. I was not afraid of being misunderstood by him, nor did I then care for offending Herbert, but I could not think of anything suitable to say. As we approached the wire-fence separating the park from the soft, grassy lawn, Herbert took the gate out of his hand with a manner that plainly expressed dismissal, yet he accompanied us to the entrance door and there stopped.

"This evening I shall permit myself to inquire after Lady Granchester."

This he addressed to my husband who, without replying, touched his hat with the scantiest courtesy he could show.

Unable to bear a scene so painful and so inverted, Herbert's paraded superiority and Colonel Palmer's humiliation, and careless of everything but what I thought was justice, I withdrew my hand from Lord Granchester's arm and gave it to Colonel Palmer, saying, "Thank you—thank you, a thousand times, not for this day's service alone, but chiefly for other and greater kindnesses. Never, never will I forget that to you I owe my better self."

A mournful smile lighted for a moment his now haggard face; he pressed my hand softly, and quickly relinquishing it, walked away.

A nous deux, as the French say. Thinking the time for our important *tête-à-tête* had now arrived, or that Lord Granchester would begin to mark his displeasure, I glanced towards him. Silently repossessing himself of the arm I had withdrawn, he moved quickly onwards, his pale face wearing the fixed, hard expression it had borne ever since he came upon us so suddenly. His mind must have been too preoccupied to remember that the nearest and most convenient way to my room was from the lawn by the stone steps. He conducted me up the large oak staircase, which, creaking as we walked, appeared broader and more consequential than ever. Ellen met me at the top, advising me to go to bed directly, adding that Johnnie had already done so.

"And had better remain there!" muttered Herbert between his teeth.

Before we had proceeded the length of the passage, Watson and the housekeeper, apprised of what had happened, were in attendance. To their care I was committed and put to bed, too much mentally disturbed to think either of the wetting or the fright, and perfectly passive under the treatment they thought necessary.

I was not unhappy about myself. Notwithstanding Herbert's careless character, there was in him a foundation of good sense and a fine appreciation of justice, which made me hope eventually to obtain a fair hearing, though now it seemed to be his principal object to avoid explanation. Continually in and out of my room, sometimes even sitting beside me, he would not talk himself nor allow me to do so; Watson, by his orders, remaining with me also, her presence effectually precluded any reference to Colonel Palmer. For the present I could only lie still and make my observations. About Herbert's mouth and brow was a grave, self-contained expression, reminding me greatly of his mother. This restraint could not, I knew, last for ever; some explanation must come, though it was evident that

for some reason or other he purposely deferred it. The housekeeper waited on me with a cordial, and my sister with medicinal drops, some of which she had just administered to Johnnie with great faith in their efficacy, all which I was obliged to accept under Herbert's approbation. He even attempted to hold the former to my lips, but finding his hand too unsteady to hold the glass, he resigned it to Watson. The potion must have had a dulling effect upon my faculties, for when in a half-dreamy state I inquired of my husband what they would do about dinner, his look of surprise and short answer, "Dine as usual," made me conscious that I had been doubting his courtesy and wondering how he would behave towards my guests. The last thing I remember that evening was his tall figure standing by my side so inordinately erect that it appeared as if no effort of mine could reach him.

Not till luncheon the next day did I meet my sister's family again. In consequence of the accident, their departure was deferred till the morrow. Johnnie, active and talkative as usual, did not seem to have experienced any inconvenience, while I, suffering from headache and great depression, felt overshadowed by some coming evil.

Ellen's youngest child, whose birth had so nearly brought the heaviest of griefs into her husband's home, was now the spoilt darling of them all. Yet, spoilt in one sense she was not, and could not be, her loving nature and pretty ways being always at the service of others. Seeing me quiet and languid, she thought I was ill, and, creeping into my lap, laid her soft cheek upon mine, twined her arms about my neck, and began caressing and cooing out, half in speech and half in song, "Poor Aunt Una!—poor Aunt Una!"

Not easily shall I forget Herbert's start of pleased surprise when, on entering the room, his eye fell for the first time on this vision of infantine loveliness, whose golden cks fell in wavy disorder as she endeavoured to rock me from side to side. In the trouble and excitement of the

previous day, the little girl had been kept out of the way with her nurse.

"What glorious apparition is this? Who is it?" he asked, quickly coming towards us.

"That is baby," answered the irrepressible Johnnie, glad to put in a claim to his uncle's notice.

"Where do you come from, little maiden? What is your name?" Sitting down on the sofa beside me, he encircled us both, and endeavoured to win a portion of the child's favour for himself. All at once memory smote me a cruel blow. My past folly in evincing so much jealousy at the caresses bestowed upon Percy's babyhood rose up as a haunting spectre to fill me with shame and distress at the thought of the sin and misery it had wrought.

"Do you come from the stars?—no, from the sun I think; you are a daughter of the sun," said Herbert, playfully.

The child clapped her little hands with glee, and then said, with coquettish hesitation, peeping through her curls, "My name is mamma's pet, and I come from home."

Willing to be talked to, and still more to be admired, she became less friendly when he stroked her curls and tried to take her. Disapproving of such liberties, and not choosing to remain longer in so dangerous a neighbourhood, she scrambled down from my knee, and ran to her mother for shelter. Herbert did not move, but sat quite still, his hand almost resting on my heart, which beat so loud that not only he, but all the room, I thought, must hear it. First I wondered why he did not remove his arm now that the child was gone; next, if he were waiting for me to put it away, and thus, by my own act, pronounce my disloyalty. In the hysterical state I was then in, had he spoken in gentle tones, had one word of endearment or even of kindliness been uttered, forgetting all present, I must have cast myself sobbing on his breast.

Johnnie's persistent efforts and repeated entreaties, "Come to uncle, baby," having at length brought the runaway to

Herbert's knee, he coaxed her on to his lap, and promoting her by degrees, was soon marching her about the room on his shoulder.

"Well, Molly, you are exalted," said Mr. Pinnoch, entering by the window as the luncheon-bell was ringing, secretly gratified at the notice bestowed on his child by his aristocratic brother-in-law, with whom he never felt quite at home.

"I am not Molly, I am mamma's pet," said the little girl with pretty indignation, and, to mark her dissatisfaction with her father's disrespectful address, she completed Herbert's contentment, by clasping her dimpled hands around his head and kissing him.

Johnnie, overawed for once, or abashed at being completely overlooked, after vainly trying to attract his uncle's attention, subsided into a quietude which sat ill upon him. Herbert could not, perhaps, forget the tarred and grimy hug on board the yacht some few years before. Emma and Maria, now personable if not handsome young women, found more favour; he called them his nieces, and praised them to their mother.

Without appearing to avoid me on purpose, he contrived to do so in reality, not only that day but on the following also, both before and after the departure of Mr. Pinnoch and his family. The suspicion was forced on me that he was afraid of encountering a confidence.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE HEART UNLOCKED.

THE gratification of the great "womanly need"—as the sense of being loved has been called—was given me, though we may fairly refuse to acquiesce in restricting to sex a sentiment which every man, woman, or child, is the better for possessing. But, oh! in what a form and in what a time had it come to me!—in such a guise, in such circumstances, that I must start from the gift in dread, close my senses, dull my feelings, and put it from me as a deadly poison!

With all my efforts I could not win any deep regard from my husband, at best a strict observance of general courtesies. He did not care to sound my heart; the ebb or flow of my affection was all the same to him; its tenderness or coldness, its power or weakness, made no difference, provided I was in my place at home, and my cheques were paid into his bankers. With such thoughts as these I persistently harassed myself, and if a dearer hope fluttered about me now and then, or an idea rose that I judged him too harshly, it did not last.

In one of these moods I was indulging, when, a few hours after the departure of the Pinnochs, my reveries were disturbed by Mary Rivers, who, tripping up the steps, entered my room, as she often did, unannounced.

"Uncle Earnest is in the drawing-room, and begs that you will give him a few minutes' conversation."

I started and rose immediately. Whatever Colonel Palmer wished to say, having deliberately sought me, I

knew I might listen to without fear. Clasping Mary's hand I descended the large staircase, hoping to gain time to collect myself.

Colonel Palmer stood beside the window, his arms folded over his chest and his eyes on the ground. At my entrance he came forward and took me by the hand, saying—"I have ventured to ask for a short interview, first to say how glad I am that your nephew's escapade has not made you ill; and next"—there was a wavering inflection of the voice for an instant, and then quickly regaining his usual firmness he continued—"and next, before I leave, I wish to thank you for the friendship with which you have honoured me. Believe me I shall ever retain a grateful remembrance of it."

Of the whole sentence, the word "leave" alone made any impression, and I involuntarily repeated it. By this time I was seated with my back to the door and facing the window. It was closed, yet, being down to the ground, any one passing could see into the room.

"I have made up my mind to return to India." His face was paler than usual, and he looked away from me, but his manner was grave and calm.

"And Holly Bush?" This was the only thing I could think of, and a thoughtless remark; he being fond of the place, it was turning the arrow in the wound.

"I shall never have a tenant unacceptable to you."

"I was not thinking of myself," I hastily answered, vexed at having appeared so selfish. Having often heard him express the hope of ending his days there, I was fully alive to the sacrifice he was contemplating.

For a moment we were both silent, then gathering courage I looked at him steadily—"Oh, Colonel Palmer, must you go?"

"I must go," he answered solemnly, "and I think never to return."

"But why to India? England is——"

"Not so good for me as India; there I can obtain something to do."

There was a load of grief in my heart, having heard him say that had he not left India when he did he should have died, and now he was returning, self-banished—Herbert and I the cause. He had been so true and kind a friend, it was bitter indeed to feel myself the occasion of his exile. Tears impossible to repress rolled down my cheeks. Without attempting to wipe them away I stretched out both my hands to him saying—"I fear I have been very, very selfish, can you ever forgive me?"

Softly and gently were my hands folded in his. I dare not say that no transparent dew veiled the sorrow his own eyes expressed, but he replied without faltering—"If those tears are for me, dear Lady Granchester, I accept them as precious tokens of the kindness and generosity of your heart; if they are for any self-imputed blame, I bid you dry them. Of all the memories taken away with me, the deepest, dearest, and most venerated will be that of a high-minded woman toiling patiently and perseveringly in the path of duty. Earth may not, nay, cannot be a paradise, but let us never forget that it may be the passage to it."

The smile with which he accompanied his words cut me to the heart, it was so mournful. I knew he went against his will, and left all whom he loved behind him. It was sad to feel that he was going to expatriate himself, yet I dared not ask him to stay. During the silence that succeeded these last words I heard the door open; it was closing as I looked round. Mary Rivers said it was Lord Granchester, but neither Colonel Palmer nor I saw him.

Colonel Palmer, in his generosity, exonerated me from all blame now, but perhaps in cooler moments, when absence strips off all false colouring, I might sink in his esteem. Wishing to forestall that time, I could not help saying—"If in after years, when chivalry dies down a little, and you should see cause to censure me—or you

should think that I had not done what I might have done—or that my weak principles need aid——" I had jumbled several fragments of thought together and was bewildering myself. Instead of finishing my sentence I burst out crying, though I desired above all things to be collected and firm.

"I shall remember you where, without spot or remorse, one friend may plead for another," he hastily interrupted. "I am a soldier by trade, a Christian soldier by profession; it should be nothing to me to fight the battle of life wherever circumstances call me. On this earth we shall probably meet no more, never see each other face to face again; but I shall hear of you, and hope and believe it will one day be as a duly honoured wife, with all the surroundings of a happy home."

As he then stood up, I knew that the parting moment had come. Unable to bear that look of sorrow, mingled with so much humility, wherein I read his self-condemnation, I covered my face.

A light hand touched my bowed head and a voice not very steady, softly said—"May the dear peace which none can know but those who are free from all self-reproach and who strive to walk faithfully in the path appointed them, be yours—now and to your life's end, and also that deeper peace which passeth all understanding. Come, Mary."

By the rustle which followed the last two words, I knew that my late companions were gone. On looking up I saw them crossing the lawn, uncle and niece hand in hand. One at least was lost to me for ever. Knowing that my feelings would speedily be beyond control, I escaped quickly from the room up the stone steps, without even a glance around, and into the sacred retreat of my little boudoir, where, flinging myself among the cushions of the sofa, I indulged a distress exceeding my power even to regulate. It was intolerable to reflect that I had thrown a shadow over that noble life, and banished him from kith and kin, from home and country, to draw out the best years yet

remaining of manhood in the uncongenial atmosphere of strangers.

The sound of my own name aroused me. Herbert, looking white and grey, with that stony expression in the eyes peculiar to him when angry or moved, was standing in the doorway. "Can you give me your attention for a few minutes?" he inquired.

Palpitating with all this strong emotion, it was difficult to grant what he asked. Nevertheless I rose and went forward, though an angry bitterness was in my heart, for was he not the responsible author of this grief and trouble? In that light I regarded him as I took my seat, sullenly, I fear, on the couch in the next room whither he led me. Sitting down on a chair near, he brought his face on a level with mine, so that we were literally eye to eye, his fastened on mine with something of the fascination ascribed to the rattlesnake. I did not like it, yet could not turn away. At first there was a nervous tremor in his hand, which he steadied by grasping the back of the sofa, and then held out the other to me, saying—

"Our days have not been passed as happily as they might have been, even with the materials we had to use. If we search for the fault, we shall no doubt each blame the other—so let it pass, I am willing to take my share. I give you my word that you have never had a more dangerous rival than the yacht; if you can say as much, lay your hand in mine. I will part with the yacht immediately, and henceforth will never seek a pleasure which you cannot share with me."

Oh that pause, which seemed so solemn and so long—the distress with which I watched the trembling of his fingers as they closed, and yet I did not move! My brain was confused, my feelings were in a whirl, I could neither sound nor understand them. An over-sensitive conscience reminded me that I was even then grieving over the fate that had overtaken Colonel Palmer. His saddened face was

now looking at me from a distance, and I could not forget it. I had just felt angry, very angry, with Herbert for his indifference—unkindness I could not easily impute to him, for it was his habit promptly to attend to any wish I chanced to express. Torn and tossed with contending forces, I dreaded to be false and knew not how to be true. Was my allegiance really gone? Taken so by surprise, with the layer of bitterness uppermost, I could not examine below the surface, and hesitated. If he would have said something more, looked or spoken with a touch of tender solicitude, so as to unlock my heart, just then so tightly closed, its fondest tribute would have been gladly paid and its treasures scattered about him. Instead of that, he silently watched my bewildered mind struggling against an exaggerated consciousness, then dived his hands deep into his pockets and walked away from me. By the time the mental mist had cleared, leaving me assured that the esteem, veneration, and attachment I felt for Colonel Palmer were altogether different from the old yearning love I had ever had for Herbert, whose voice, touch, care, and affection were all in all to me, it was too late. He had gone away, and was, I thought, out of my reach, as I felt too ill to attempt to follow him.

The sudden exclamation—"This is too bad!" told me that I was mistaken. He was still on the balcony, though out of sight from the place where I sat. "Colonel Palmer returning for another interview. Let me tell you, madam, that you are presuming too far upon your liberty and my forbearance." He said this, re-entering the room, and speaking with a sharpness quite at variance with his usual polished tones.

I was silent, wondering what could have brought Colonel Palmer again to the house. Before I thought of replying, a knock came to the door and Watson appeared.

"Colonel Palmer is below, and wishes to see Lord Granchester."

"Lady Granchester, you mean," said Herbert, correcting her with emphasis; his high breeding had gone down before his displeasure, making him forget that he spoke to a servant.

There was a short whispering with the footman behind her, and then Watson repeated, "With Lord Granchester; he only asked for my lord."

Without another word he darted down the steps, and I was left alone.

Alone all the rest of the day, my heart carried a painful burden, as must ever be the case when thoughts and feelings, burning and throbbing, escape the control they require. The mere clasp of the hand of a sympathetic friend would have been a comfort, but I had no one. I dared not send for Mary Rivers, the link was too near the trouble. I could only envy those who can stoically endure—the brave front which some can turn to the blow which crushes feebler natures. Yet the weakness, if such it be, has its recompense in the sinking of that pride which is never a safe counsellor. We cannot live for ourselves alone, at least not happily. A self-centred life for woman is an anomaly, one she can only lead at the expense of her best characteristics. Some cherished ideal or valued tie to diffuse and regulate her sympathies is a dear necessity. Where would many of us be with our morbid repinings and nervous sensibilities, so often misunderstood, were it not that they lead us on to make a more intimate acquaintance with "that better land," where they will have no existence!

The chill produced by being so long in the water, added to the painful excitement undergone, so overcame my energy that, when the dressing-bell rang, I was obliged to decide upon going to bed instead of to dinner. Watson was sent to tell my husband that I was too tired to dine. He expressed no surprise, and, after his solitary repast, went out.

Late in the night I awoke from a sleep into which, after

much restlessness, I had fallen. There was no sound or appearance of Herbert. The window in my sitting-room had been left unfastened by my desire. Even for an August evening the air was warm, and, not expecting to sleep, I thought I might be glad to enjoy its coolness from the balcony. When I rose and stood there, the light from Herbert's windows below gleamed strong through the crimson curtains. Half-dressed I descended the steps, and approached first one window, then another, until I found an opening in the drapery. Four large wax candles were burning on the same table, which was covered with papers and letters in great disorder, and a tin-box, evidently the receptacle from which the former were taken, was open near. But where was Herbert? After continued looking, I descried a recumbent figure on the sofa—whether waking or sleeping I could not tell; the eyes were closed, and the face, in the dim light which fell upon it, was worn and old, without a trace of its general smooth and sunny expression. Whilst I gazed he began to move, when, fearing he might observe me, and, mistaking my object, be vexed at my presence, I slipped back to bed.

Not till after breakfast did I see him again, and then the brightened countenance and careful toilet had completely effaced the care-worn appearance of the preceding evening.

"I am going to town by the next train—perhaps to Cowes also. I cannot say exactly how long I shall be away, it may be only a few days, it may be longer, all depends upon how speeds my errand."

Instead of the formal salute which usually accompanied his departures and returns, he grasped me by both hands and looked searchingly into my face, saying, "Have you nothing to say to me before I go?"

What had I to say? Nothing, unless he questioned me. Having told me where he was going, and that his stay was uncertain, there was nothing for me to ask.

"No; nothing," I replied.

"Absolutely nothing," he repeated. "Do you remember that I am your husband, or do you mean to remind me that having voluntarily resigned my authority, I have no longer a right to expect your confidence? You shall find that I can be resolute in more ways than one."

"I feel very ill," I murmured, in a voice so low that I think it did not reach his ear, for, relinquishing my hands as soon as he had finished speaking, he bounded across the room and down the steps, with a velocity little in harmony with his naturally graceful carriage. In a few minutes more he was on his way to the station.

Colonel Palmer was already gone. A hurried line from Mary Rivers had reached me, saying that she and her uncle were to leave Granchester that morning by the early train.

In the wearisomeness of the following days, increased by much physical languor, a trial was preparing for me with which I found myself unable to cope. The house was large and dreary, one half being quite shut up. No friends were about me, none having been invited to succeed my sister; and with the Stanleys, for obvious reasons, I could just then enjoy no intimacy. Without any positive ailment, I felt thoroughly ill, borne down by a depression which turned the very sunshine into gloom. A solemn dulness hung about the old place—an absence of light and colour, interest and expectation—a painful lack of any power capable of throwing joy or cheerfulness into life. A dull aching was about my heart, which felt heavy and stagnant, as if its natural current could no longer flow. I was sick in mind as well as in body, and needed kindness, pity, love—a sympathising voice, a tender hand—some watchful care whose ministrations might lull my anxiety to rest. My sister's home was the only place where such a prospect was offered me. The more I thought of her dear face and sweet ways, the more I longed to be sheltered and comforted by her affection. Unhinged as I was, I could not see where my duty lay, and was beginning to grow irritable and to

indulge all kinds of fancies. The necessity of getting away from Granchester was uppermost—to Ellen I must go, or I should take to my bed with fever. Having so decided, before Herbert had been a week away, I wrote and fixed the day for my arrival at Brooke Hall. Watson received my orders about packing with surprise, chiefly at the number of things I proposed taking, enough, as she observed, for a long absence. Dull as my faculties were, I saw the necessity of giving Herbert some explanation of my flight —the second that occurred in my married life. With nothing to conceal, my task was not difficult. Having given Watson all needful directions, I rapidly wrote off the following:—

"DEAR HERBERT,

"Though you will not find me at Granchester on your return, I would not have you think that I have left your house in anger, resentment, or mortification—still less that I am acting under a consciousness of secret disloyalty to you. Had you questioned, you would have found my fealty unshaken. I go because I am ill and require a physician; because I am weary, and need rest. My nerves are bruised, my fibres are aching. I want pity, I want kindness—gentle nurses, and soft voices to soothe me, even though I may deserve chiding. I am too weak to bear up any longer. The affection of my kindred is the medicine my present state of health demands, and I go to Brooke Hall to seek it. You would not blame me if you could see me as I am, for I know you are just, and believe that you wish to be kind. Whenever you desire my presence, I will return. If I am never to win your love, I will compel your esteem—if I cannot efface the wild and foolish tempers of my youth, you shall be able to rely upon the duty and steadfastness of maturer years. A letter, a line, the single word 'Come,' will at any time bring me to your side, a true and faithful wife—a helpmate in every trouble, if you will permit me to be so."

These last words were added in reference to his affairs, which I had reason to fear were becoming daily more entangled and discouraging. Before concluding the letter, I yielded to a strong desire to see once more the most interesting parts of the house. A shadow of evil hung over me, a weight of unexplained care pressed me down. Dark spots were everywhere in the mental horizon; perhaps the illness creeping over me might prove a sickness unto death, and I might never see home nor husband again. After

visiting all the habitable rooms, and looking at the lawn and grounds from every different window, I repaired to Herbert's own room, which I had not entered since he went away. It was much changed since that night I saw it from the outside. Everything was unusually tidy; the letters, then thickly strewn about, were now carefully strapped together in parcels and laid in order on the table. The large papers and parchments had disappeared, most probably had been replaced in the box. As my eye fell upon it, partially concealed under the table, I perceived a bunch of keys hanging from the lock. Poor Herbert! he was so thoroughly careless in all matters of business, that he had neglected the important duty of locking up what he had put away. Having fastened the box, I wrapped the keys in paper, with a line saying where they were found, and sealed and directed the little packet. That done, I slowly looked around, wishing to impress my memory with every thing in the room as it then was, and afterwards dropped on my knees by the sofa, whose ruffled pillows vividly recalled the care-worn face I had seen there. Never did my heart yearn more strongly towards my husband than then, with that picture before my eyes, and the recollection that I was voluntarily leaving him. I wished him happiness, peace, contentment, every good thing, yet, instead of offering up petitions for his welfare, I broke out into passionate sobbings, feeling that the end of all hope was come, and that I should never be more to him than an accident in his life. "O Herbert, Herbert!" was my anguished cry, when I found myself raised from my kneeling posture, and unexpectedly answered—

"Una, dearest! my wife, my love!—you are a Christian woman; have some indulgence for faults and follies that have truly brought their own punishment. Say that you will not close your heart against me, that you will endeavour to restore me your affection, which is not only all I have to look to, but is all the world to me. For some time

I have known its value, and felt the want of it. I have nothing to offer you, darling, but utter bankruptcy—for Mr. Randolph's daughter, poverty. Is it not mortifying for me to ask so much and give so little? yet Una, I am selfish enough to say, 'Stay with me; don't leave me now that I have nothing but your tenderness to come between me and a life without object or interest!'"

He held in one hand my unfinished letter, with the other he drew me nearer—closer, closer. Our tears mingled together as we mutually asked forgiveness one of the other. We had so much to say which could only be said in broken sentences; yet amid all that brokenness and inaccuracy of language one sweet sound fell on my ear and echoed in my heart—I was dear to him, very dear; I had won his love, and was prepared to regard it as the brightest jewel I possessed.

Never was there a sweeter evening than the one which closed this day, as we sat together out of doors after dinner, conscious of increasing happiness with every fresh breath inhaled. The stars looked down upon us as we talked, their silver beauty appearing to me emblematical of the delicious peace I was feeling. Aching hearts might be looking up at them, asking the repose they could not give. Yet I knew one for whom the splendour of the star-bespangled heavens would not be opened in vain, whose faith, outshining all, would one day grasp the conqueror's palm, and, till that moment arrived, would bid human grief retire behind the glorious promises of Him who "stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain."

Among the happy confidences of that hour, I learned that from an early period of the acquaintance Colonel Palmer had favourably impressed my husband, gradually working in him a humiliating consciousness of the difference in their two characters, as exhibited in their sentiments and manner of life. Of their last interview he said but little, though it lasted two hours.

"I went to it," said Herbert, "feeling that if legally right, I was morally in the wrong, answerable for what had happened. When I heard his tale, his honest avowal of an affection sprung up without his knowledge, the grief he felt at the discovery, and his shame at having declared it; when I listened to his justification of you, his decree of banishment against himself, and vainly waited for any reflection against me, I felt more humbled than I can tell; ostensibly master of the situation, and that was all. In contrast with such a character, I had little chance of gaining your esteem, yet was resolved not to forego it. Instead of speaking to you at once, as he advised, I resolved to take some steps for disposing of the yacht. I would not ask your confidence until I could give some proof of a wish to deserve it. Success so far rewarded my obstinacy, that the yacht will soon have a purchaser; but I nearly lost your love."

"Because you were too proud to take it without purchase," answered I.

"Speak out honestly, Una. Was it not better first to prove my sincerity? Are you not more satisfied that I come with a sign of amendment in my hand?"

To this question, repeatedly asked, I would give but one answer: "If a man will give all the substance of his house for love, it shall be utterly contemned;" and with this he was obliged to be contented.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LIGHT AT EVENTIDE.

THE visit to Brooke Hall was paid, but in a different manner from what I had intended. I did not go for health: that came with the gladness that fixed itself day by day more deeply in my heart, and tinted every object and scene about me. Even Granchester, hitherto gloomy in its stately decay, put on a cheerful appearance, making me wonder that I had ever found it dull. The joy and gratitude glowing within were reflected around, doubling my capabilities of enjoyment by thankfulness for possessing them—feelings which, to some minds, mingle nameless pain with ecstasy. Sweeter than all was it to hear Herbert relate the changes in himself; how soon he regretted the compact he was too proud to break; how he wondered if my quietness proceeded from indifference, and what he was pleased to term my meekness, from apathy; how he began to weary more and more of the society and amusements which had so long constituted his chief pleasure; how he often wished that I would ask him not to go away so much, or that I would express a wish to accompany him. But in all these confidences, nothing more relating to that two hours' interview with Colonel Palmer ever transpired. I would not ask, and he never led to the subject.

Herbert accompanied me to Brooke Hall. Mr. Pinnoch was known as an excellent landlord and a good manager of property. It was a novelty, indeed, to see my husband gravely consulting him and making notes of his advice. Day after day some portion of the estate was visited, cot-

tages inspected, improved plans examined, and agricultural interests studied. Lord Granchester was in earnest to turn over a new leaf, and sink the man of pleasure and fashion in the country gentleman. In most of the expeditions I had to take part, generally mounted on the pony of one of my nieces, my husband assigning two reasons for not leaving me at home; first, that being his secretary, prime minister, and major-domo, my intelligence was his rightful possession; and next that, if left behind, I might take the craze to be off to Kamtschatka or the Scilly Isles. Pleasure as well as business mixed itself with these daily strollings, especially on those occasions when "mamma's pet" accompanied us. No longer shy and coy, she distributed her favours somewhat partially, habitually giving Herbert the greater share, who repaid her with amusing devotion. In the general flow of his spirits, even Johnnie might have come in for notice, and perhaps have effaced former disadvantageous impressions; but, unhappily for the boy's ardent desire to stand well with his uncle, during the whole of our visit he was at school.

"We are still young, we may yet have many years of happiness," Herbert was never tired of repeating, a hope which I sincerely echoed.

The visit at Brooke Hall ended, we returned to Granchester about the end of September, with fixed resolutions to lead a life of retirement and retrenchment. The yacht had been sold for its full value, and Herbert's principal man of business was occupied in collecting his debts. When all claims were ascertained, our course of life was to be decided upon, whether to live quietly at Granchester, or to shut up the house and go abroad till better days should come. Either decision was agreeable to me, though, stimulated by new-born elasticity of temperament, I was most inclined to enjoy the activities of a travelling life. Alas! for the stability of human plans—the hopes and expectations on which we set our panting hearts! For me it is no quotation of a

poetic wail to say, "They vanish as the wind sweeps over them." In my case it was literally true. The last day of that September bears a black mark in the meteorological calendar. A heavy storm passed over some parts of the country, blighting and destroying wherever it went. In our immediate neighbourhood it was not very severe, but at the Beeches and in that direction great damage was done. Large hailstones of dimensions rarely seen did mischief enough, yet that was inconsiderable compared to the raging wind, which swept along with the force of a tornado, unroofing houses, tearing up trees, and laying low at a gust some of the finest ornaments of the forest.

Before I relate its disastrous effects upon me and mine, memory fondly lingers in those never-to-be-forgotten scenes of love and home, which for a brief space were my privileged portion. I was happy, very happy, thankful too that, as Herbert so constantly reminded both himself and me, we were still young enough to build castles and look forward to inhabiting them. I was eight-and-twenty, and he only five years older—both still in the prime of life, both bound together all the stronger for the discipline we had undergone.

The second day after the storm, a letter arrived from Lady Elmore requesting my husband's presence at the Beeches. The injury done to the house and cottages on the estate, though extensive, was light in comparison with that sustained by the trees in the park. For the cottagers she was doing all in her power, allowing those whose homesteads were destroyed or unroofed to take possession of all available barns and out-houses until the needful reparations could be made; respecting these she wanted to consult her son, and draw his attention to the fallen timber.

"I will go early to-morrow," said Herbert, as we talked over the letter.

"Why not to-day?" I asked, procrastination being no part of my temperament.

"I hardly know, except that this gives me much to think of. How are all these unlooked-for expenses to be met? That is the difficulty. Such an inconvenient time for any extra outlay," observed Herbert, impatiently.

"It is God's time, dear husband," I ventured to say, twining my arm round him. "He sent the storm, not man."

I cannot forget the sweet smile with which he raised my face with his hand, and kissing me, said, "Good Una, I will try and think so too." For the rest of that happy day I felt so thoroughly that we were one in heart, and could discuss life's highest themes together. His dear face had on it an expression of tender earnestness I had never seen there before. It was as if another world of thought had opened, and he was entering into its brightness. Early next morning he started for the Beeches.

"I shall be back in a few days, and then commences our rigid economy," he said, laughing.

"Yes; no longer lavender kid gloves *ad libitum*, for careless people to sow by the wayside," was my reply.

"Nor embroidered slippers to be swept about the floor by long-robed waiting-maids," was the playful retort.

We had begun to make sport of imaginary privations. Twice he came back and kissed me, saying the last time, "I almost wish I had persuaded you to accompany me, but there, I should be occupied all day, and you would not care to be with my mother alone."

Having accompanied him to the hall door, I received a last glowing glance of kindness and affection, and then turned back, deeply thankful that God had given me the trusting love for which my heart had so often prayed.

At parting, Herbert had mentioned the fourth day of absence as in all probability the one of his return, and not having heard from him, I was expecting him back to dinner. The air was clear and crisp when the mid-day heat of an October sun declined; its mellow rays, falling on the tufted trees, brought out their variously-tinted foliage sharp and

rich against the bright blue sky. To beguile time I thought of visiting my humble friend, Mrs. Jenkins, still a rheumatic invalid, and was preparing to do so, when a servant announced "Mr. Darnell."

My blood rushed wildly through my veins, and then seemed to stignate. I could not draw my breath, every power was paralysed, and a cold sickness came over me. Mr. Darnell was the old butler at the Beeches, Lady Elmore's factotum, who, I knew, would never leave home but on some important errand. The first glance as he entered the room alarmed me; his frame had become bent and feeble, his hands trembled, and when, after watching the closing of the door with an anxious stare, the tears rolled down his withered cheeks, I could control myself no longer. Rushing towards him I endeavoured to shake the dumb statue into life, crying out, "Darnell! Darnell! what is it? In mercy speak. What has happened? my husband—— Speak! speak! or I shall shake you till your tongue is loosened!"

"Lord Granchester has met with an accident, and is very ill," the old man slowly articulated. Then having once spoken, he proceeded to relate that Herbert had fallen from his horse, and was found lying on some broken trees quite senseless. The whole morning he had been riding about the estate with the bailiff, making notes of the injuries done by the storm and of the necessary repairs. About one o'clock the bailiff left him, and went home to his dinner. An hour and a half afterwards he was discovered lying on a sharply-riven trunk, his note-book on the ground near, and the horse quietly grazing not far off. Absorbed, it was supposed, in his occupation, he had taken no heed of the path, and had been struck by one of the huge and partially severed branches.

"Is he alive?" My quivering lips had just power to put the question.

"Yes, my lady, and coming home. Lady Elmore wished

to send for you, but he would not allow it when he came to himself. He asked the doctor if he could not be conveyed to Granchester. At first he objected, but afterwards gave permission. My lord was so anxious about coming home, that I think they yielded to quiet him. My lady is coming too, and the doctor. They will be here soon. My lady thought you would prepare the most cheerful room in the house for him."

The most cheerful was our own, with my bright convenient salon adjoining, where he might perhaps be able to lie on a couch before the window, and have the best view that Granchester afforded.

What would my stately stepmother have said to see me holding Darnell by the hand, and trying by all manner of questions to elicit some comfort from his narrative? Alas! he had none to give; he could only sob out that he feared more than he hoped, and that so many of the family had died from paralysis. Dismissing him to the housekeeper's room to tell his dismal tale, and prepare the servants for this miserable return of their master, I shut myself up in my own room. Solitude I must have; any face would have been painful to look on. At first it was scarcely possible to realise what I had heard. A few days before my beloved husband was well and bright, rejoicing in the strength of his manhood and in the promise of future years, and now I shuddered to think of what might be coming. With tears and sobs and inarticulate prayers, I besought the Great Lord of all to have mercy on him and me—to be pitiful, compassionate, and gracious—to speak to us in His mighty love, and by that I meant to restore my husband to health. I knew then no other reading for the attribute I invoked with such unspeakable agony. Fifty times I must have left my knees during the long waiting to look out and listen for sounds, and fifty times I returned to them, entreating at last for patience and strength to bear this dreadful suspense. Then feeling the necessity of action if I would not have my

blood stagnate into despair. I went out and in of the room continually, moving or touching something in order to keep my energies alive.

At length came the noise of carriage wheels. Fearing to show myself suddenly, I stood where I could see without being seen. A mattress stretched across the carriage and a figure half recumbent upon it, was the first painful sight. Did that represent my shattered love and vanished happiness? The face I longed, yet dreaded to behold, was turned the other way.

Lady Elmore immediately alighted. Catching a glimpse of me, she came forward, twined her arm in mine and forced me back into the drawing-room, saying, "Wait, Una; you must give him time to recover a little. He will be tired and faint. It was a trying journey. He ought not to have been moved, but he was determined to get home. The doctor is watching over him, and will let you know when you may see him. Wait patiently."

Wait! She bid me do an impossibility. How could I wait patiently when every nerve quivered, every fibre ached with a pain I knew not how to bear? Shaking off her detaining hand, I was outside the hall door in a moment, bounded up the steps, and reached my room just as they were carrying him into the bed-room adjoining. I saw his face then; it looked paler than I had ever seen it, and had a distressed expression upon it. Had Darnell softened down his doleful story to give me a temporary respite?—was not the pall of death already covering those beloved features? Desperately I struggled with myself, yet I think he heard somewhat of the overpowering grief which succeeded that terrible thought. No sooner did the bearers lay him down, than his eyes went questioning round the room and his lips moved. Believing they must have framed my name, I darted forward saying—"Here, dearest!" His medical attendant would have taken me away, but it was too late for interference. With the little strength he had,

Herbert pressed the arm I had flung about him, and his cheek rested on mine.

"Dear, darling wife!" he whispered, "I left you strong and happy—I am brought back a mere wreck, never more to be anything to you but a burden! How will you bear it?"

The tears rose to his eyes. He had not reconciled himself to the heavy trial—thus in manhood's prime to be struck down into the helplessness of childhood, nor yet had I. Was this the end for him? Was there no future but this—his days, if prolonged, enveloped in gloom, shorn of all that gives colour or zest to life—cut down in early maturity—alive yet dead—dead to all the hopes and interests which a very short time ago were palpitating in his breast? Was the work of reformation to be thus arrested, when he was so sincere in desiring to carry it out? Ah! to this dispensation of mystery there was but one answer, and no peace until we could listen to it: "Be still, and know that I am God."

The attendants soon withdrew, and we were left together. I was the first to speak.

"It is the will of God, dearest—let us try to submit," said I, on recovering myself a little. "I will tend you so lovingly, so willingly, you shall never have a wish unfulfilled in my power to gratify. I will be eyes, hands—everything to you."

Lady Elmore now entered with the doctor, who enjoined absolute quiet, and prohibited all further conversation.

Days passed without bringing any change to the patient—each one dawned with anxiety and closed in hopelessness. The best physicians were called in, only to confirm our worst fears. Nothing could be done—there was no skill in man or on earth which could renew the shattered forces of that dear life. An indefinite period of waiting, perhaps without much suffering, was all that could be promised.

"My wasted existence!—my ill-employed time and energies! Oh! for one year of health to leave behind me a record of something better!" was Herbert's oft-repeated

lamentation through the long winter we spent together in that sick chamber.

Lady Elmore came now and then to see her son, but we were happier without her, even though my heart ached in listening to his frequent regrets over the thoughtless days gone by, for he had no reserve with me.

"What good are they now, when I turn from them with self-loathing? Oh! God of mercy, forsake me not, as I have forsaken Thee!" was the prayer perpetually on his lips.

God be praised, it was not all darkness with him. Mr. Stanley became a true and tried friend, whose visits were always acceptable.

"Make what use of my life you can," said he one day to Mr. Stanley. "If I cannot be an example, let me be a warning."

The winter passed away. It was not an unhappy one. Lady Emily came once. Though Herbert received her kindly, he did not ask her to repeat the visit. "I only want my Una," he would say, as I sat on a low stool beside his couch, often at his request pillowing my head beside his that he might the better look at me.

Before the spring came, there was a great change in my beloved one. Earthly regrets grew fainter and heavenly hopes stronger. As the buds began to shoot and the birds to carol their sweet songs, he would watch and listen with a quietude and peace which had not yet reached my restless spirit.

"I grieve to leave you, Una, my good and faithful wife," he one day said to me. "I grieve to think that I have only thanks to offer for all your tender devotion—that I can never shield you from pain or trial, never fold you to my heart and sustain you with a man's strength and energy—but—but—it is God's will that so it should be. I must receive all from you, and make no return. He is very merciful. He has thought of me though I have so often

forgotten Him. Thanks be to His goodness that I have been spared to see this; I might have been cut off in a moment, as many are." Nor was his long an indefinite hope. "I see a light before me, and am groping my way towards it slowly, but surely," he would sometimes say.

After a while all that was misty cleared away, and we heard him express a firm faith in the promises of the Gospel. The Stanleys and he became more and more intimate, one or other being often present in the sick-room. Sometimes Herbert would keep Mrs. Stanley with him, while he sent me out to take the air. Returning on one occasion earlier than I was expected, I found the two earnestly engaged in a conversation which stopped abruptly at my entrance.

"She is too young and handsome to be left uncared for," said Herbert, addressing Mrs. Stanley, passing the one hand he could use caressingly over my cheek, when, taking my accustomed place on a low stool by his couch, I laid my face near his.

"I am sorry to leave you, dearest," he said one day when we were alone, "most sorry that it is not permitted me to make the latter part of your life happier than the first. It is sad to know the chief value of life when one is going out of it—to know what would yield us most happiness when all our chances are over. I have lived for self and pleasure—what I thought pleasure—and now all is as a foolish dream. To think that I cannot recall one moment of time, nor efface a single folly—that the past is traced as with an iron pen on the pages of Eternity! I have no despair of forgiveness, but such regret, O Una, to think that one can undo nothing we have done, nor make up what we have left undone!"

Another time, trying to soothe my grief, he said, "Don't cry so bitterly, Una. It is best as it is. Had I lived I might have offended more. Who shall say? Our best resolutions for good are weak when we try to put them into practice. I know you will not forget me, dear, but don't

think of me too sorrowfully. I want you to be happy." Then kissing me, he whispered very low, as if it cost him something to speak his wishes, "You will have some true friends about you when I am gone. If ever circumstances so shape themselves that a prospect of happiness woos you again, remember that I, your husband, bid you embrace it. If my spirit could know that your present mourning was to be turned into gladness, I would rejoice at it. I am not generous, only just, dear. Now don't grieve so heavily, and don't answer me," for my tears fell fast and choked an attempt to speak. "I will say no more, only urge you to think of these words in years to come."

To prevent reply he turned the conversation upon other topics, principally upon my squandered property and reduced income, lamenting again and again that his extravagance had so wronged me. "Out of all your father left us, when all debts are paid, I fear there will be little for you beyond the sum he so wisely put out of my reach. I was always alive to the justice of his will."

"My income is ample for my wants, nor will I spend that until every debt you owe is paid. No one shall suffer for you," said I, eagerly.

"Except yourself," he answered quickly, adding, with a sad smile, "Shall I not care for you, and lay down my selfishness this side the grave?"

Spring gave place to the early days of summer. The delicate, green foliage toned down to the rich fulness of the season, and the winds, soft and balmy, brought waves of fragrance wherever they passed. My loved one still lingered with me, not yet called to solve the mystery of death, or take his solitary path to the spirit-land where he would be hidden from my sight. The kind respite made me still cling to the expectation of keeping him yet longer, not because the doctors or the natural course of the illness gave me any cause for hope, but because to put that hope away would wrench my heart-strings too cruelly. It was no

elastic hope pressing up to the surface, too strong to be repressed, but a heavy weight lying at the bottom of my heart, and almost insupportable.

As the closing days of summer approached, he was always asking more and more anxiously about the Indian mail—when the last came in, and when the next was expected. Before long the mystery was explained by Mrs. Stanley paying him a visit with a companion, and that companion her brother. I knew little of the first interview, only that when I re-entered the room, from which I had been banished whilst Mrs. Stanley remained with Colonel Palmer, Herbert drew me close to him and whispered, with the old sweet smile I used to find so fascinating, "My Una will not be quite desolate when I am gone—she will have the best of friends to think and care for her."

Dear, dear Herbert! his last anxious thought was for me. Though the intensity of my nature had greatly toned down, I found a deep though sobered happiness in that sick-room. My husband valued my presence; I was his nurse, companion, friend—the wife beloved and trusted; the last breathings of his earthly affection were mine—mine now, and for ever.

"We are wise for Eternity, why were we not wise for Time?" he said one evening, when, resting his raised head on my shoulder, he gazed on the setting sun sinking gloriously into a bed of crimson clouds.

"How bright the sky is!" said I, after a pause; "it looks like molten gold."

"Bright!" repeated Herbert, "yes; but there is the Sun of Righteousness brighter still, to dawn upon me and every repentant sinner." He articulated slowly, almost painfully, speaking more to himself than to me. After a short silence he spoke again: "Close the window, Una, and kiss me. Good-night; I think I am going to sleep."

I did as he requested, and, holding his hand in mine, nestled down into my usual place beside him.

The shades of evening melted into twilight; a stillness, more than usually solemn, filled the room. After a while, thinking I heard some sound, putting my ear to his mouth, I asked, "Did you speak, dearest?"

"I know in whom I have believed," came strongly from his lips, followed by complete silence. There was a little gasp for breath, the dear hand fluttered for a moment, and then lay heavily in mine. All was over. The golden gate had opened and closed. My beloved husband had passed through, and entered into his eternal rest.

Herbert, dear Herbert! Even now there is a chastened joy, a mellowed sorrow, more pleasing than saddening, in thinking of those days of watching, of loving, tender communing. The grief that most smote my heart was from the reflection that had I been better disciplined, more careful, more conscious of accountability to Him who giveth all our faculties, affections, and possessions, I might have had a life filled with fewer regrets and more satisfactory reminiscences—of peace, and not of storm.

In the budding of our years, in the spring of our hopes, alas! that youth should so often spurn the teaching which yields the sweetest fruit in after years!

CHAPTER XL.

THE LAST WORD.

SEVERAL years have run their course since the great sorrow recorded in the last chapter. Even at the period my tears flowed fastest, they were mingled with thankfulness. With little pain, the tedium of the sick chamber relieved by my ministrations, the days as they went by brought soothing influences to us both, and, as the time for separation approached, elevated our thoughts and affections. As the frail tenement decayed, Herbert's spirit looked more brightly out of it. At the loosening of "the silver cord," he was ready and willing to depart, and passed away gently and tranquilly with the lights and colours of evening. But not into darkness; for him the sombre portal of the tomb was brightened with the psalms and hymns of victory.

The happiness I missed in youth, through his tender, thoughtful care has settled over my maturer life. Where the current flows smoothly, an English fireside furnishes few incidents of interest beyond the family circle. Yet I hope the reader who has followed me thus far will not be unwilling to journey a little longer in my company, nor to turn the page of the new volume of my present history.

My life seems to have been divided into two distinct parts, and I to be two different individuals: the early portion, like a rudderless bark tossed on the turbulent waves of passion and sorrow, resisting ignorantly where it should have been content to glide, and idly flapping its sails where they should have been spread for exertion; the latter where it has entered the still waters of a great peace.

Of the characters connected with me in the course of this autobiography, there is not much to relate. Julie Kenyon likes her work, into which she is able to throw a large amount of energy and perseverance, and has exchanged her asceticism for a real and an attractive Christianity. Lionel and Agnes Osborne are married, but the event only took place a few years ago. Granchester has descended to a distant heir, now a minor.

The pretty but humbler residence of Holly Bush is mine, enlarged, I may say improved, according to our present demands. I have long been its honoured mistress, a happy wife and mother, sustained and cheered by the manly strength and tenderness I estimated so highly. My eldest child, a girl of seven, is at present her father's companion, and her two young brothers are my play-fellows. They must some day change places, each, I hope, to be benefited by the intimate association. I cannot desire better for my children than that they may resemble their father, or that their future course may be as bright to them as the present is to their parents. We two are bound together by many and peculiar ties. Though keenly enjoying the blessings now around us, we often talk of our beloved ones in that shadowless land from whence a few rays are streaming over our path, even here and even *now*.

Mary Rivers is Mary Rivers still, my dear and cheerful friend, happier, she tells me, in her uncle's present home than she has ever been before.

THE END.

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